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JESUS
NEITHER
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MAN

THE CASE FOR A
MYTHICAL JESUS

NEW • REVISED • EXPANDED

First Published As
THE JESUS PUZZLE:
CHALLENGING THE EXISTENCE OF
AN HISTORICAL JESUS

EARL DOHERTY

JESUS: NEITHER GOD NOR MAN

From reviews of Earl Doherty's *Challenging the Verdict: A Cross-Examination of Lee Strobel's 'The Case for Christ'*

"Well-intentioned people like Lee Strobel and his 'expert witnesses' in *The Case for Christ* have been inspired to speak half-truths, misrepresentations, and plain absurdities in defense of Christian doctrine. Earl Doherty confutes Strobel and his theologians point for point so thoroughly and convincingly that one is left wondering, how did I not see that before? Christian apologetics' faith-based thought processes contrast with Doherty's reasoned refutation and clearly reveal how intellectual integrity is sacrificed at religion's altar of 'believe at any price'."

LEE SALISBURY, a former evangelical church pastor 1978-1988; writer and speaker for atheist groups and publications from 1992.

"In his systematic refutation of Strobel's book, Earl Doherty takes on not only Strobel but the many prominent apologists Strobel interviews and quotes throughout the book... Doherty performs a great service by taking on the new generation of slingers of the same old hash. His book is a great tool. When someone says, 'Here, read Strobel, and your skeptical questions will all be answered!' we may hand them Doherty's counterblast... Doherty's chief goal is not to argue the Christ Myth theory, but neither does he soft-pedal it, since it often simply pops up as the glowing alternative once one sees the preposterous nature of the apologists' arguments."

ROBERT PRICE, author of *Deconstructing Jesus* and *The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man*; from a review appearing in *Free Inquiry* magazine, Summer 2002.

Some reviews of the original *The Jesus Puzzle*:

"This is one of the most exciting and liberating books I've read in years. Doherty has written a potential modern classic, which deserves to be widely read and discussed."

JAN KOSTER, Professor of Linguistics, Groningen University, The Netherlands

"A great book! I can only say I felt like the disciples on the road to Emmaus: 'Did our hearts not burn within us as he opened the scriptures to us?'"

ROBERT M. PRICE, author of *Deconstructing Jesus* and *The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man*

"This is a great personal achievement, and I think your work will make a substantial impression on New Testament scholarship. A sunburst over the lingering gloom of the quest for the historical Jesus."

ROD BLACKHIRST, Professor of Religion, Latrobe University, Australia

"I have never read such scholarship in so easy a style! You have a wonderful way of conveying quite complex ideas in an easy to understand manner. I've read a great many books challenging (Jesus') historicity, but nothing as 'dead on' as your book."

JUDITH HAYES, author of *In God We Trust.. But Which God?*

"This is the most compelling argument ever published in support of the theory that Jesus never existed as an historical person. Doherty's thorough command of the Pauline corpus, the pseudepigraphic and apocryphal literature, the mysteries, and turn-of-the-era philosophical and theological movements is masterful. This is a superb book."

FRANK R. ZINDLER, Editor, "American Atheist," a Journal of atheist news and thought

The Jesus Puzzle website: www.jesuspuzzle.com & www.jesuspuzzle.org

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JESUS
NEITHER GOD NOR MAN

The Case for a Mythical Jesus

Earl Doherty

Age of Reason Publications
Ottawa Canada

To Julian
for his support and encouragement
and for a cracking good title

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PREFACE

During the 2007 season of the television series "Bones," its brainy heroine, a forensic anthropologist cum homicide detective Dr. Temperance Brennan, made a reference to the founder of Christianity with this passing comment: "Christ, if he existed..." A similar remark was heard later in the episode, both spoken tangentially during discussions among the characters, forensic scientists at the Smithsonian Institute trying to solve the latest foul-play case of unearthed bones. This was on a major U.S. network in prime time. How many viewers caught it, or what their reaction was, is not recorded. But it may well have been the first time any of those viewers had heard such a radical idea floated in popular entertainment beamed into North American homes following the supper hour.

When *The Jesus Puzzle* was published in 1999, the theory that no historical Jesus ever lived was still generally regarded as a fringe idea. Although a small minority of scholars had championed such a conclusion for almost two centuries, it had achieved little traction among the public or in New Testament scholarship. Now a decade later, the idea is beginning to poke a tentative head out of parts of the mainstream scholarly landscape. Yet this has already been overtaken by a growing segment of the general public, especially among those plugged into the Internet, where presentation and debate on websites and discussion boards has increasingly intrigued and even won over many to the idea.

The advent of the Internet has introduced an unprecedented "lay" element of scholarship to the field. The vastly accelerated dissemination and exchange of ideas, the easy availability of ancient texts and works of modern scholarship only a click away, the absence of peer pressure and constraints of academic tenure, has meant that the study of Christian origins is undergoing a quantum leap in the hands of a much wider constituency than traditional academia. While the latter has always been centered in university Religion departments, the field is now open to dedicated 'amateurs,' the latter being a technical term for those who undertake private study outside an official educational setting.

Mainstream critical scholarship's ongoing quest for "the historical Jesus" is yet to arrive at any secure or consensus result. Agreement on what Jesus said and did, on whether he was a Jewish wisdom teacher, an apocalyptic prophet, a revolutionary, a Cynic-style sage, or any of a number of other characterizations, is as far from being achieved as at any previous stage of the perennial attempt to separate the glorified Jesus of faith from the elusive Jesus of history. It remains to be seen how soon traditional academia will overcome its reluctance to take the plunge into the New Testament's final, uncharted territory. It has become known on the Internet as "Jesus mythicism"—the theory that no historical Jesus worthy of the name existed, that Christianity began with a belief in a spiritual, mythical

figure, that the Gospels are essentially allegory and fiction, and that no single identifiable person lay at the root of the Galilean preaching tradition.

There is one rebuke regularly leveled at the proponents of Jesus mythicism. This is the claim—a myth in itself—that mainstream scholarship (both the New Testament exegete and the general historian) has long since discredited the theory that Jesus never existed, and continues to do so. It is not more widely supported, they maintain, because the evidence to the contrary is overwhelming, and this evidence has been presented time and time again. It is surprising how much currency this fantasy enjoys, considering that there is so little basis for it. I recommend my three-part website article "Alleged Scholarly Refutations of Jesus Mythicism," a rebuttal to a century of works—rather few in number, in books and parts of books—seeking to refute the case for mythicism. It begins at: <http://jesuspuzzle.humanists.net/CritiquesRefutl.htm>.

In the early 20th century there were a number of efforts to counter the strong current of Jesus mythicism at that time, but the works on both sides of that debate are long outdated. There has been in recent times no major published work from mainstream scholarship dedicated to disproving the mythical Jesus theory. This alone is critical, since significant advances have been made in New Testament research over the last quarter century, such as the new perception of the high midrash content of the Gospels, advances in Gnostic studies based on the Nag Hammadi documents, new insights into the Q document's layering and evolution, and so on. The case for Jesus mythicism has kept pace with these developments and has strengthened itself accordingly, yet virtually none of this has been answered by today's historical Jesus defenders. When modern scholars have commented on Jesus mythicism (as a part of books or articles devoted to other aspects of New Testament study), it has generally been a superficial affair, repeating old objections that have long been dealt with by mythicism's advocates and betraying an inadequate understanding of the depth and character of their case. It has been amateur Internet apologists, usually faith-driven, who have stepped into this vacuum and offered web-based articles attempting to refute the mythical Jesus position. These have attracted rebuttals by mythicists, including several by myself.

The original *The Jesus Puzzle* book has had a substantial impact, and is generally regarded as the leading and most persuasive publication in recent years in support of the mythical Jesus theory. It is regularly being cited, supported and attacked. This impact has been achieved in conjunction with The Jesus Puzzle website which predated the book by a few years. The primary purpose of both site and book was to reach the open-minded 'lay' audience and only secondarily to invite consideration or challenge by established academia—something that has so far not been offered. With this new and expanded edition of my work, I hope to appeal to an audience in both mainstream academia and the general public.

Partly because I intend to keep the original book in circulation as a simpler version of the case, I have given this expanded offering a new title. Perhaps an apology for the length of the new book is in order, but over the years I have been

urged by many to make any new version of *The Jesus Puzzle* as comprehensive as possible. However, the structure of the book remains the same, with many common passages, and I have continued to avoid an overly academic tone and approach. As before, I insert most source citations within the text itself. I prefer to use the endnotes to add usually short, largely secondary but still informative material on the matters being discussed, so as to avoid overloading the primary text—though I recommend that the notes not be passed up. The Appendices serve the same purpose, but as more extended Excursuses. The detailed Index includes important keywords, and the scriptural references are included within it. As in the original book, there are pointers to more lengthy discussions in the form of URLs for articles on The Jesus Puzzle website. (Should the address of that site change in future, the reader may search "The Jesus Puzzle.")

My debt to traditional New Testament scholarship remains immense, while that to other scholars who work outside mainstream confines has increased over the years, and I will try to give credit where credit is due. As might be expected, *The Jesus Puzzle*, book and website, have been challenged on the basis of my perceived lack of proper or sufficient credentials, and my non-involvement in the established world of academia. But good argument and evidence ought to be able to stand on their own and be evaluated on their own merits. On the other hand, it is natural to want some idea of proficiency in considering the work of an author in any field, so I will end here on a personal note that was lacking in the original book. My formal education consisted of a B.A. with Distinction in Ancient History and Classical Languages, (Greek and Latin, the former being essential in any research into the New Testament). Unfortunately, I was forced to suspend my M.A. program due to health reasons and did not return. After a number of years in which I was pursuing another, very different occupation, I took up my own private study of Christian origins and related disciplines. After a period of 14 years, I created The Jesus Puzzle website and soon after, *The Jesus Puzzle* book, shortly followed by a second publication, *Challenging the Verdict: A Cross-Examination of Lee Strobel's "The Case for Christ"*.

To those, layperson or academic, who demand more, I can only offer my regrets. To the rest who have open and inquisitive minds I offer the work itself, trusting in the power of its observations and arguments and the lucidity of its presentation. No mathematical proof is available, no laboratory demonstration. All we can achieve is a judgment as to balance of probability, although perhaps such a thing can get close to definitive. In the field of history this is all we have. In the area of religion, a little more is first required: the temporary relaxation of established *belief*, in order to give evidence and its rational interpretation a chance to commend itself. If the probability is arrived at that the Gospel Jesus of Nazareth is a fictional or symbolic character, the world will not come to an end. It need merely change, and it has usually been rather good at doing that.

About Translations

There are many available translations of the New Testament. In this book, I have not followed any single one, since all of them will occasionally betray Gospel preconceptions in their translation of the epistles, and because parts of a given translation are, in my view, more accurate and effective than other parts. I have sometimes combined the features of more than one translation in a given quotation, and will occasionally include an element of my own, usually in the direction of rendering the original Greek more literal, for clarity's sake and to eliminate preconceptions. For most biblical quotations I have indicated the translation(s) used, including my own.

Abbreviations of translations: NEB (New English Bible); NASB (New American Standard Bible); NIV (New International Version); RSV (Revised Standard Version); NAB (New American Bible); KJV (King James Version); TNT (The Translator's New Testament). I have drawn most often on the NEB, with its modern, informal style which can bring out clarity of meaning.

Glossary and Abbreviations

Most explanatory information is provided in the text and notes.

Apocrypha = ("hidden") writings not regarded as sacred, excluded from the canon of scripture. Many are included in bibles after the canonical texts.

Christology = study or teaching about the nature of Jesus / Christ

Diaspora = Jewish communities spread throughout the Roman Empire, as a collective entity, in both a geographical and cultural sense

Exegete / exegesis = one who interprets the meaning of a biblical text / the process of doing so

Kerygma = "proclamation" about Jesus by the early Christian apostles

LXX = short for Septuagint: pre-Christian Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures

Parousia = the "presence": referring to the arrival in glory of Christ at the End-time

Pericope = short passage of one or more verses comprising a distinct unit

Redaction = editing of a document or source according to the editor's interests

Soteriology = theories/teaching about redemption, usually as bestowed by a savior

New Testament references: e.g., Galatians 3:23-25 = chapter 3, verses 23 to 25.

Abbreviations of document titles are used only within brackets. (See Index for abbreviations of each of the New Testament documents.)

f = 'and following': means an unspecified number of pages after the one stated;

p. = page; n. = note; ch. = chapter; v. = verse; c = circa (around, referring to a date); lit. = literally. In the Notes only: c. = century; d. = died.

op. cit. = In bracketed references to published works, this signifies 'the book title by this author stated in the last reference to that author.'

Brackets: In a quotation, round brackets signify paraphrase or clarification, square brackets signify the present writer's inserted comments.

End-notes are numbered consecutively throughout the book.

THE TWELVE PIECES OF THE JESUS PUZZLE

This list is a summary overview only and does not follow the layout of the book

[1] Jesus of Nazareth and the Gospel story cannot be found in Christian writings earlier than the Gospels, the first of which (Mark) was composed only toward the end of the first century CE.

[2] There is no non-Christian reference to Jesus earlier than the second century. The two references in Flavius Josephus (end of the first century) are unreliable and can be dismissed in their entirety as later Christian insertions.

[3] The early epistles, such as Paul and Hebrews, speak of their Christ Jesus (Messiah Savior) as a spiritual, heavenly being, one revealed by God through scripture, and do not equate him with a recent historical man. Paul is part of a new salvation movement acting on revelation from the Spirit.

[4] Paul and other early writers place the death and resurrection of their Christ in the supernatural/mythical world based on Platonic and Semitic cosmology, and derive their information about these events, as well as other features of their heavenly Christ, from scripture.

[5] The ancients viewed the universe as finite and multi-layered: matter below, spirit above. The higher world of the heavens was regarded as the superior, genuine reality, where spiritual processes and heavenly counterparts to earthly things were located. Paul's Christ operates within this system.

[6] The pagan "mystery cults" of the period worshiped savior deities who had performed salvific acts. Under the influence of Platonism, these acts came to be interpreted by the cults as taking place in the supernatural/mythical world, not on earth or in history. The Pauline Christ was similarly regarded as undergoing death and resurrection in the heavenly realm. This new Christ belief also shared other mythological concepts current in the ancient world.

[7] The most prominent philosophical-religious concept of the period was the intermediary Son, a spiritual channel between the ultimate transcendent God and humanity. Such intermediary concepts as the Greek Logos and Jewish personified Wisdom were models for Paul's heavenly Christ and Son, who took on an additional, sacrificial role under the inspiration of scripture.

[8] All the Gospels derive their basic story of Jesus of Nazareth from one source: the Gospel of Mark, the first one composed. Subsequent evangelists reworked Mark in their own interests and added new material. None of the evangelists show any concern for creating genuine history. The Acts of the Apostles as an account of the beginnings of the Christian apostolic movement is historically unreliable, a second century piece of legend-making.

[9] The Gospels were not written as historical accounts, but present a symbolic representation of a Galilean kingdom-preaching sect, combined with a fictional passion story set on earth, probably meant to allegorize the heavenly Christ's death and resurrection in the supernatural realm. They are constructed through the process of "midrash," a Jewish method of reworking old biblical passages and tales to reflect new beliefs. The story of Jesus' trial and crucifixion is a pastiche of verses from scripture, and has nothing to do with "history remembered."

[10] "Q" is a lost sayings collection extracted from Matthew and Luke, and made no reference to a death and resurrection, or soteriological role for its Jesus. It can be shown to have had no Jesus figure at its roots: some of which roots were ultimately non-Jewish. The Q community preached the imminent coming of the kingdom of God and the arrival of the heavenly Son of Man, and its traditions were eventually assigned to an invented founder who was combined with the spiritual Christ Jesus of the Pauline type in the Gospel of Mark. The case for the existence of Q is much superior to any alternative explanation for the common material in Matthew and Luke.

[11] The initial variety of sects and beliefs about a spiritual heavenly Christ and Son of God, some with a revealer role, others with a sacrificial one, shows that this broad movement began in many different places, a multiplicity of largely independent and spontaneous developments based on the Jewish scriptures and other religious expressions of the time, not as a response to a single individual or point of origin.

[12] Well into the second century, many Christian documents lack or reject the notion of a past human man as an element of their faith. The type of Christ belief which became later orthodoxy developed only through the course of the second century, to eventually gain dominance toward its end. Only gradually did the Jesus of Nazareth portrayed in the Gospels come to be accepted as historical and his 'life story' real.

INTRODUCTION

Once upon a time, someone wrote a story about a man who was God.

We do not know who that someone was, or where he wrote his story. We are not even sure when he wrote it, but we do know that several decades had passed since the supposed events he told of. Later generations gave this storyteller the name of "Mark," but if that was his real name, it was only by coincidence.

Other writers followed after, and they enlarged on the first one's tale. They borrowed much of what he had written, reworked it in their own particular ways and put in some additional material. By the time another half century had passed, almost everyone who followed the religion of these storytellers accepted their work as an account of actual historical events and a real historical man. And so did the people who came afterwards, for close to two thousand years.

About two centuries ago, these "Gospels" began to be subjected to some searching examination. Not only were they found to contradict one another on important matters, it was eventually realized that they had been conceived and put together in ways, and with motivations, which suggested that they were not reliable historical accounts. Their fantastic and uncritical dimensions, such as the miracles and the involvement of God and the supernatural, placed them outside the genre of history writing as we know it. That process of scholarly examination has continued to this day, with results that have undermined the very foundations of the Christian faith.

Recently, a scholar began his book about the Jesus of history, the actual man and his career that were supposed to lie behind those non-historical accounts, with this sentence:

On a spring morning in about the year 30 CE,¹ three men were executed by the Roman authorities in Judea.... [E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, p. 1]

But is even this statement to be questioned? Is even this piece of "irreducible data" a part of the tale written by the storyteller who penned the first Gospel? Did that third man crucified by the Romans on a hill in Judea, beside the two highway brigands, have any historical existence at all?

The story told in the Gospel of Mark first begins to surface around the end of the 1st century CE. Yet the curious fact is that when we search for that story in all the non-Gospel Christian documents written before that time, it is nowhere to be found. It is missing even from many documents produced after that period, some extending into the latter half of the 2nd century.

If we had to rely on the letters of the earliest Christians, such as Paul and those who wrote most of the other New Testament epistles, we would be hard pressed to find anything resembling the details of the Gospel story. If we did not read Gospel associations into what Paul and the others say about their Christ Jesus, we could not even tell that this figure, the object of their worship, was a man who had recently lived in Palestine and had been executed by the Roman authorities with the help of a hostile Jewish establishment.

Could this be because they are not in fact speaking of any such figure? Could it be that if we remove those Gospel-colored glasses when reading the early Christian writers, we would find that all of them, Paul especially, have been telling us in plain and unmistakable terms exactly what the earliest Christians *did* believe in, and what the Christ they all worshiped really was?

Gaining an understandable picture of the early Christian movement, to which Paul's writings are the most important surviving witness, requires that one delve into the thinking of the age among both Jews and gentiles: the philosophy, views of the universe and kinds of myths those people believed in. Christianity, like all other human expression, was a product of its time and did not arise in isolation from the thought world around it. Christianity was also by nature a sect, in that it adopted and advocated new ideas which brought it into conflict with the milieu it grew out of. Thus its development must be understood in the context of how sects behave and interact with the world around them.

As part of this picture of the times, one needs to be aware of the crossover influences which took place between Judaism and the Greco-Roman society it lived within. Even as it struggled to stave off integration, Jewish culture, more diverse than it eventually became under the rabbis, absorbed a great deal from its wider environment, especially in the Diaspora, those Jewish enclaves distributed throughout the Roman empire and further east. Nor was the process a one-way street. Jewish monotheism and ethics were embraced by great numbers of gentiles who joined Jewish synagogues and sectarian groups in varying degrees of conversion. One of the features of early Christianity was the attraction of gentile believers who adopted Jewish ideas and practices, eventually considering themselves the new inheritors of the Jewish God's promise. These mutual crossover influences gave rise to a new faith which was a hybrid of both cultures, and a product which would shape the future of the Western world.

Yet to use the term "Christianity" or a phrase like "the Christian movement" is fundamentally misleading. It implies that the phenomenon being studied was a single entity, something unified, that it began in a particular location out of an identifiable set of circumstances and events. It also implies—so Christian tradition has it—that it was all set in motion by a specific historical figure, Jesus the Christ, and by the actions of those who responded to him. But such a picture evolved only later. In reality, "Christianity" in its beginnings was much more diffuse. It was made up of several unrelated strands of activity within the religious philosophy and culture of the time, strands which lacked any common point or figure of origin. Only through a unique set of circumstances did all of

those strands come together to produce the picture of Christian origins which the world has envisioned for so long.

The focal point of that coming together was the first Gospel, the Gospel of Mark, which created the figure of Jesus of Nazareth and made him the personification of all the preceding strands. Once that turn in the road was taken (a good estimation is that it took place some time around the year 90—for which evidence will be provided), the picture thus created gradually impacted on the different expressions of the broader movement until eventually all those who styled themselves believers in the "Christ" thought that their faith had begun with an actual man who had lived at a recent time in history and had given rise to all the varied beliefs and practices they shared.

This book will continue to use the words "Christian" and "Christianity," but in that initial period before the Gospels bestowed a new meaning on them, such terms will refer to the wide variety of groups, a mix of Jew and gentile, that believed in a Christ or Son of God who was a divine Savior, but who was not yet regarded as having been on earth.

Two Traditions

With this overview in mind, the basic pieces of the Jesus Puzzle can be laid out. The Gospel story is an amalgamation of two principal and separate elements—the wedding, if you like, of two different parents. This was a 'couple' who had never directly associated, who may not even have been aware of each other's existence until those unique circumstances arose which led "Mark" to bring them together in his Gospel.

The first parent was a Jewish preaching movement centered in Galilee, although it seems to have extended beyond that region. The itinerant prophets of this new 'counter-culture' expression announced the coming of the kingdom of God and anticipated the arrival of a heavenly figure called the Son of Man who would judge the world. They urged repentance, taught a new ethic and advocated a new society; they claimed the performance of miracles, and they aroused the hostility of the religious establishment.

Some of this movement's traditions² came from different sources, so that it comprised multiple strands of its own. No Jesus, divine or human, was originally present on the scene, although later in its evolution a certain segment of this kingdom sect (which also developed the Q document) envisioned for itself a founder figure who fed into the creation of the Gospel Jesus. Before his entry into the Gospel of Mark, however, this invented founder was linked to no death and resurrection, no events in Jerusalem. To apply a concept used in some modern scholarship, this side of the puzzle, this half of the composite picture of eventual Christianity, will be called the "Galilean Tradition."

The second parent was not so localized. Even though this side of the puzzle will be referred to by another concept in some scholarly usage, the "Jerusalem Tradition," and even though Jerusalem was an important center for this half of the Christian picture, in reality it too was comprised of many strands. It came to

life in numerous places across the eastern half of the Roman empire, expressing a great variety of ideas. It too was a preaching movement, built on a Jewish base but combining Jewish and pagan traditions and religious concepts. It was conducted by apostles who might roam far afield to deliver their message of salvation and establish congregations of believers.

That message was about a heavenly Son and emanation of God who was both an intermediary between God and the world, and a Savior figure. To some extent he was inspired by the traditional expectation of a Messiah; he was a new 'take' on that concept. He was variously called Jesus, or Yeshua (meaning "Yahweh Saves" in Hebrew), the Christ (Greek for the Hebrew "Mashiach," or Messiah, meaning "Anointed One"), and the Son. Some looked upon this new Son of God as a Revealer who bestowed saving knowledge of God, others as one who had undergone a sacrificial death and a resurrection. All manner of apostles like Paul were going about preaching this divine being and often not agreeing among themselves about him; indeed, they could be at each others' throats, as passages in Paul's letters reveal.

This Son and Savior was not identified with a recent human man or placed in an earthly setting, much less given a ministry of teaching and miracle-working in Galilee. Instead, he was a heavenly deity who had done his redeeming work in the supernatural dimension, in the spiritual levels of the universe above the earth. He bore strong resemblance to two important expressions of the time. One was a philosophical idea we may call "the intermediary Son," a spiritual emanation of God and a spirit channel between him and humanity; this was the dominant philosophical-religious concept of the Hellenistic³ age. The second resemblance was to a wide range of pagan savior gods found in the "mysteries," the dominant form of popular religion in this period, going back to ancient roots. Like Paul's Christ, these savior gods were thought of as having performed acts in a mythical world, acts which brought sanctity and salvation to their believers. These cults had myths and rituals very much like those of the Christian movement.

Like the people who preached the kingdom of God in Galilee, the apostles who spread their faith in a redeeming Son of God, and the communities across the empire which formed in response to them, envisioned an imminent end or transformation of the world. It would come with the arrival of the Son from heaven. Such groups were thus sectarian in nature, and they too aroused hostility on the part of society around them. Even more so than the Galilean movement, and partly because it was so widely diffused, the Son of God faith was uncoordinated, with no central governing authority or set of doctrines.

Divisions of the Book

Because these two sides of Christianity originally had nothing to do with one another, they must be examined separately. This book falls into four divisions. The first two deal with the two Traditions, the third with their artificial union in the Gospels and how that amalgamation changed the course of Christian history. A fourth division will address the question of non-Christian witness to Jesus.

The first division will examine the Jerusalem Tradition. (This term is used in scholarship because the Gospel picture has created the belief that the death and resurrection of the Christ which Paul preached was an earthly one, located in Jerusalem.) The record of this Son of God movement lies in the New Testament epistles and other early Christian letters and documents. In the Christian canon—that collection of writings later chosen by the Church as authoritative and divinely inspired—the epistles have been appended to the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles as though they all relate to the same Jesus figure, as though they follow on the Gospels and Acts in some natural sequence. But this "New Testament"⁴ was put together only in the latter part of the 2nd century. The majority of the epistles, which came from all over the Christian world, were written earlier than the Gospels, and demonstrate no knowledge of those Gospels or their content. Nor do virtually all of those which were written later.

Thus, the first division of the book will examine the Son of God movement Paul was a part of, what its ideas were and where they came from, as revealed by the documents themselves and the wider picture of the times. And it will survey in some detail the silences in those documents about anything to do with the Gospel Jesus and his story.

The second division of the book will examine the Galilean Tradition. This kingdom of God movement operating in Galilee and beyond produced most of the traditions which ended up in the Gospels as part of the ministry of their fictional Jesus: about conflict with the establishment, healings and miracles, a new ethic for the kingdom, about the imminent end of the world and the arrival of the Son of Man. The evidence for this Galilean side of the puzzle lies mostly in the Gospels themselves, specifically the three Synoptic Gospels, Mark, Matthew and Luke. Synoptic means literally "seen together," referring to the fact that these three Gospels have such great similarity of material that they can be compared side by side. "They are similar in outline, contents, order and wording. Most impressive are the verbal agreements, which are almost total in some passages" (*Harper's Bible Dictionary*, p. 1009).

The initial focus will be on an ancient document which has not come down to us but which modern scholars have reconstructed out of certain common parts of Matthew and Luke. They call it "Q" (for the German *Quelle*, meaning "source"). It is from this otherwise lost collection of sayings and anecdotes, older than any of the Gospels, together with a recently rediscovered document outside the New Testament—another collection of sayings attributed to Jesus called the Gospel of Thomas—that modern critical scholars have put together their picture of a "genuine Jesus," a picture I will argue is unfounded. (Most of one chapter will be devoted to supporting the theory of the existence of Q.)

Out of the Galilean Tradition grew the Gospel of Mark. Its picture of the ministry of Jesus is based on the kingdom preaching movement represented by Q (even though Mark seems not to have possessed a copy of the Q document itself that was used by Matthew and Luke). But in a bold, innovative stroke, the author incorporated into his Gospel the idea of the heavenly Savior who had died and

risen from death in the thought of the Son of God movement. This spiritual sacrificial Savior Mark identified with the Galilean preacher, and he placed this dimension of his story in Jerusalem, in the form of a trial by the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, a crucifixion on Calvary and a resurrection from a nearby tomb.

The third division of the book, "A Composite Christianity," will examine how the Gospel of Mark was constructed, its allegorical character, how it was followed and enlarged upon by other Gospels, and how the new ideas they all contained gradually spread until Mark's central character Jesus of Nazareth came to be regarded as the historical originator of the entire movement. The final division of the book will look at the non-Christian witness to Jesus, as found—or not found—in the pagan and Jewish writings of the period, with detailed looks at the Jewish historian Josephus, the Roman historians Tacitus and Suetonius, and other historians and writers of the first two centuries.

A Minority Report

There is no question that, outside theological halls, modern Christianity and its views of Jesus are based on the New Testament Gospels, while the Acts of the Apostles provides the popular picture of how the Christian faith movement began and spread. Much of what is presented in the New Testament epistles is largely ignored or ill-understood; even theologians and biblical scholars struggle to grasp much of what someone like Paul says. Outside the canon of the New Testament lie many documents which are the product of the Christian movement during the first two centuries CE, almost all of which are totally unfamiliar to the vast majority of Christians. Most of them are collected, for example, in *The Apostolic Fathers, Vols. 1 & 2* of the Loeb Classical Library (trans. by Kirsopp Lake), or the more popular Penguin Classics' *Early Christian Writings* (trans. by Maxwell Staniforth): works such as the epistle 1 Clement, the letters of Ignatius of Antioch, the Didache, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Epistle of Barnabas. Here we should also add several 2nd century apologetic works, as well as a number of non-canonical Gospels which have survived only in fragments but often treat the story of Jesus in a different fashion from the canonical four.

Remoter still are several documents which present seemingly Christian elements or echoes, yet strike one as inhabiting different worlds, perhaps Jewish sectarian ones. Several documents in the collection known as the *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (ed. by James H. Charlesworth) have uncertain connections to Christianity, such as part of 1 Enoch, The Odes of Solomon, the Ascension of Isaiah, even though scholars sometimes judge them to be, at least in part, Christian products. Beyond these, thanks to the recently unearthed cache at Nag Hammadi in Egypt, we have an extensive collection of Gnostic documents, products of a distinct but multifarious style of faith during those early centuries which had a checkered relationship with what became orthodox Christianity. Some of its thought world has enough of a kinship with the latter to be called "Christian Gnosticism," yet the many anomalies in regard to theology and the figure of Jesus forced the movement as a whole into the category of "heresy."

The point to be made is that the Gospels and Acts form only one small portion of the early Christian record. They reflect but one category of thought and witness to what that broad movement believed in; and this principle applies even within the diverse catalogue of the New Testament itself. There is by no means, as we shall see, a uniformity of content to be found on any scale. When it is further realized that even the collection of Mark, Matthew, Luke and John cannot be regarded as four independent, corroborating accounts, but rather constitutes a chain of literary dependency and enlargement on the first one written, with Acts as a satellite attached to one of the later writers in that chain, then the weight and portion of our "Gospel" category shrinks even further when set against the full skyline of the early Christian landscape.

And yet, the picture created by this minority subset of authors has been allowed to dominate the rest of the scene. Its shadow has been so magnified it falls over everything else; its ideas determine the interpretation of all else in the record. Scholars and believers alike view the world of early Christianity through the prism of a narrow handful of inbred writings, and it has distorted all that they see. The dominance which that little complex of documents managed to achieve might be likened to the evolutionary success of a single organism or species within a teeming stream of life, one that emerged into prominence because of an inherent advantage or appeal, eventually to overcome or interbreed with its relatives and rivals to create a new entity dominated by its own particular features.

The Big Bang

It is entirely from the Gospels and Acts that we derive the idea that Jesus died on Calvary and then rose from his tomb outside Jerusalem on Easter morning, resurrecting himself in human flesh on earth to spend time with his disciples before ascending to Heaven. It is often claimed that only through such an event—or the perception that such an event had taken place—could one explain the explosive genesis and spread of the Christian movement. "Something must have happened!" they say. It would require some such launching fuel to power the fervor and enterprise of the followers of Jesus who carried their faith about him across half an empire within a few decades, to capture the allegiance and dedication of outsiders like Paul, to win over the hearts and minds of countless converts, Jew and gentile alike, who immediately formed Christian communities and a Church that would steadily expand until it took over the empire itself.

Such a claim is only possible because we are so in thrall to the Gospel scenario and the distortion of early Christianity it created that we are unable to envision an alternative. We fail to recognize the much broader and more complex picture revealed by the non-Gospel record which can explain how the movement came into being and developed without the "Big Bang" requirement governed by the Gospels and Acts. That faulty and circular reasoning process has been operating since the time of the church historian Eusebius in the early 4th century.

In his work entitled *Theophania*, Eusebius acknowledges that the Gospel story, as representing the faith message preached by the original apostles, is not credible; indeed, it is ridiculous. How, he asks, could they claim that a man "was no other than the Word of God," that he performed miracles and showed such power, and yet could then "suffer reproach and infamy, and at last the capital and shameful punishment of the cross," then to say that "they saw him after His death," and that "He rose from the dead?" No one, says Eusebius, having any intellect at all, not even one who was illiterate, would accept any of it, nor its requirements of allegiance, especially when it also entailed a rejection of one's own ancestral wisdom and practices. And yet, Eusebius did accept it, he embraced it. Why? Because he could witness (so he thought) the march of the new faith and church through history, to arrive at the summit of power in his own day. To the mind of Eusebius, this would not have been possible unless the message of death and resurrection originally preached by the apostles was indeed true. Such a success story could not have happened without God and truth behind it.⁵

What Eusebius and others have failed to realize, however, is that the Gospel story he appeals to never happened. The original apostles of the Christian movement preached no such message tied to their own recent lives and an actual man they had known. The march of Eusebius' religion followed roads much rougher and more tortuous than the Gospel story would indicate. That story took time to develop, to be accepted as an historical account; it became a backward projection onto a misunderstood and disconnected past. No one ever preached it out of the blue, and no one accepted it that way. One need not worry about the so-called "criterion of embarrassment," which maintains that since no one would make up such an embarrassing and disgraceful scenario as the leader of one's movement being executed as a common criminal, it must actually have happened that way.

Rather, that idea sort of snuck in the back door of people's minds (though not without some resistance), its way prepared by earlier forms of faith in which a divine figure submitted to death under very different conditions, indeed in a very different world. The latter simply needed a certain amount of tweaking—a revamping which began as symbolism but which many, such as Ignatius, would find desirable and not at all embarrassing, especially when it had all been spelled out in scripture. The sources in scripture which had been seen as revealing saving acts in the spiritual world had been turned into the sources of a story that now migrated to the physical world, with those saving acts now performed on earth. The new appeal of this evolved product was not only irresistible, it was also politically advantageous. As such, it provides a classic example of Richard Dawkins' concept of a "meme," an idea which acts like a life form in itself, undergoing a continuous propagation from mind to mind, similar to a biological transmission of genes.

That appealing Gospel tale which has become one of the world's sturdiest memes has waylaid our understanding of historical reality at every turn, as well

as created apparently insoluble problems for the traditional New Testament interpreter. Why is there such dramatic and irreconcilable variety of Christian expression and belief from the virtual onset of the movement? Why is all sign of the Big Bang itself, not least the rising of Jesus to earth in flesh, missing in the non-Gospel record? Why does the Paul of the epistles contradict the Paul of Acts in key areas? And so on. Defenders of orthodoxy often base arguments on Gospel-inspired assumptions which have no concrete basis in the record, such as the overworked claim that all, or almost all, of the apostles died for their faith, which thus could hardly have been a lie or based on something that they knew never happened; until one realizes that the 'fact' of this universal martyrdom is nowhere supported except in later Church tradition, where it was invented along with so much else. Until we are able to put the Gospels and Acts in their proper perspective and stop letting them submerge and obscure a more clear-eyed view of what early Christianity constituted, what factors brought it into being, and how it evolved over its first hundred and fifty years, the Western world will continue to live and perpetuate a fantasy.

Part of the achievement of that proper perspective is being accomplished from within the Gospels themselves, as the scholarly deconstruction process increasingly reveals that they are composed of anything but historical material. Ironically, they may never have been meant to represent literal history, as various indicators show, although whether their authors thought that the figure around whom they built their stories had actually been historical, or whether he simply served symbolic purposes, is not entirely clear. Yet even in the face of the evaporating reliability of the Gospels as history, modern mainstream scholarship still continues to declare its traditional—and largely unexamined—certainty that an historical figure lies behind those decidedly non-historical narratives.

Stepping outside of the Gospels and Acts, into the epistles of the New Testament and other non-canonical documents, achieving that proper perspective I referred to, should also be possible, but it will require scholarship to set aside its Gospel presumptions and look at those writings in their own light. There they will find a vast new vista, a world quite unlike the artificial one that has been imposed on them; it will revolutionize our picture of ancient religion and the roots of Christianity. The pieces of that picture have always been in plain view, and some have long been recognized, but the tyranny of the Gospels has forced them into erroneous patterns.

The mythicist case, and mine in particular, has regularly been accused of dependence on the argument from silence, a focus on what *is not* to be found in the epistles regarding the Gospel story and its character Jesus of Nazareth. But this is a misrepresentation, for it spotlights only one half of the situation. My own case has laid an equal, if not paramount, emphasis on what *is* to be found in the epistles, on the actual information presented by Paul and other early writers in describing their faith movement and the object of its worship. I frequently answer that the texts present both *negative* and *positive* silences. Both involve a void on the Gospel story and character; but the latter are the more telling, for

they present us with a coherent, concrete picture of Paul's religion, one that is self-sufficient, that excludes or makes no room for that story and that character, or indeed any human man at all. The thing it is silent on is not there because it is not needed. It is more than superfluous; it is an intrusion that disrupts the picture being presented. This goes qualitatively beyond a simple argument from silence.

When the new vista presented in the epistles, in the mystical Shepherd of Hermas and the jeweled Odes of Solomon, in the Logos religion of the 2nd century apologists, in the visionary Ascension of Isaiah and the phantasms of Gnostic cosmology, when all this is freed from its subjugation to the Gospels and is recognized as a riotous diversity of faiths and salvation systems encompassed within a great roiling sea that can be called early Christ/Son belief, and when that complex of belief is related to the broader picture of ancient dying and rising gods and other salvation mythology, Platonic dual-world philosophy, Hellenistic mystery cults and Jewish apocalyptic imaginings, then the understanding of our religious past will finally come into focus, and it will dazzle us. It will also work great changes.

First Century vs. Modern Thought

One of the problems in either defending historical Christianity or debunking it lies in the vast differences in the mindset of the 1st century versus that of the 20th or 21st. So much of the original doctrine and outlook of Christian belief was dependent on views of the world which have long since been abandoned. A falsely perceived structure of the universe, the existence of demons, the principle of blood sacrifice of animals so endemic to ancient ritual and communication with gods, along with a range of other primitive ideas, lay at the heart of the new (and not so new) religion, and most if not all have entered the dustbin of outdated concepts in every other area of modern life and knowledge except religion. If the bible is to retain any integrity or relevance, today's Christian is essentially forced to believe in a literal Heaven and Hell, in angelic and demonic forces, that the Deity required a terrible blood sacrifice of his own Son in flesh in order to forgive the sins of humanity. Conservative scholars must champion the feasibility of supernaturalism and miracles against nature. When the modern rationalist appeals to science and rationality to reject such things, a protective barrier is mounted to defend those indispensable elements. Dogma inevitably interferes with the resolution of what ought to be treated as purely historical questions.

We are also hindered in that resolution by fundamental differences between ancient and modern modes of thinking. Our own recently-achieved age of enlightenment has engendered a focus on literality and reason; we think (and rightly so) that the achievement of any 'truth' must pass through an objective scientific process, and that any statement of knowledge must entail a good degree of literal understanding. Ancient myth can no longer serve the primary purpose it once did. Humanity's environment, the workings of the human mind, modern discoveries like the genome system, such things cannot be understood or

manipulated through mythical renderings; we need their literal exposure. The early history of the world cannot be understood and taught through the myths of Genesis; we need to uncover its literal evolution and artifacts. Poetry may enrich our experience of and response to the world, but without literal knowledge we get little closer to comprehending and controlling it. So much of the ancient view of things was determined by myth because that was essentially all they had. Even if it was prompted by subconscious racial memory and intuition, in the absence of objective knowledge and scientific judgment myth could lead down the path of ignorance and the distortion of reality. Ironically, myth was often taken literally, with counter-productive and perilous results.

Thus, we need to be wary of bringing modern literacy and rationality to the ancient record, of imposing our own standards on what it meant, on what we decide could have been believed or not believed by early Christians. Their truth was arrived at through a 'knowledge' of the world which is no longer tenable, involving anomalies we would no longer accept—unless forced to do so by the demands of religion. We cannot judge their use of language by our own use of language. We cannot determine what constituted the original Christian belief according to what we today would be led to accept. The mythical heavenly Christ of Paul ought not to be rejected simply because *we* would reject it.

Symbolic Originators

While many factors went into the creation of the Gospel Jesus, an important general principle lies at the basis of its understanding. The Gospel picture centers on its main character, Jesus of Nazareth. It is he who pronounces the new teachings, he who performs the miracles. It is he who engages in controversy with the religious establishment which does not approve of the things he is saying and doing. To judge by orthodox tradition, it was Jesus himself who was the source of all the new ideas and reforms which swept the religious scene at that time, in Palestine and beyond. It was he who had unleashed a new anticipation of God's kingdom on earth. This view continues to enjoy support from many modern scholars, although the most liberal among them have considerably whittled down the catalogue of actual sayings and deeds they are willing to attribute to him.

But there is another way of viewing this picture, and of understanding how the artificial figure of Jesus emerged in the first place. It is a natural human tendency to explain the development of progressive ideas, new technologies, better social and political systems, as the product of exceptional individuals, idealized forerunners, sometimes even as proceeding from divinities. The reality is typically otherwise. Society as a whole or a group within it produces the innovation or the swing in a new direction. There may be a trend 'in the air,' a set of subtle processes taking place over time. Eventually, these developments become attached in the popular or sectarian mind to a famous figure in their past, or embodied in an entirely fictitious personality. History is full of invented founders for religious, social and national movements, such as Taoism's Lao-

Tse, Lycurgus of Sparta, or William Tell at the time of the founding of the Swiss Confederation. It is now generally recognized that these people, and others like them, never lived. A famous figure whose existence has recently come into question is the Chinese philosopher, Confucius.⁶

This means that much of what has been attributed to Jesus, the pieces that went into the Gospel picture, are really descriptive of the communities which lay at the roots of those Gospels. These things represented the experiences of their leaders and preachers, of the foot soldiers who carried on the sect's activities. It was the sectarian community itself that was in conflict with the establishment around it.

The idea of the imminent arrival of God's kingdom was one of the driving forces of the age. Groups like the one which produced the Q document had formed to preach it. It was their prophets who performed perceived miracles, a phenomenon that was an expected and indispensable sign of the coming of the kingdom. The new movement as a whole, in its various manifestations, produced the innovative ethics, drawing in some cases on precedents and outside sources. Indeed, the urge to such reform, in an attempt to correct the injustices of the age, was one of the main impulses to this activity in the first place.

Much of the human Jesus, the catalogue of what he says and does, is simply the epitomizing of all these trends and personalities. At the same time, because the tendency to impute ideas and practices to an imagined, idealized individual took place, in the case of both Traditions, within a sectarian milieu, other factors were impelling the creation of Jesus. The demands of sectarian life and its struggles with the outside world make the acquiring of such an innovator and founder, especially one of heroic or divine proportions, something of immense advantage. The sayings and deeds attributed to this founder become more authoritative; they may gain more respect from the establishment. The members of the sect are inspired to greater fervor and willingness to follow their leaders. This development of a glorified or fictitious founder figure is a relatively common occurrence among sects and religions throughout history and around the world, and we will look at some of the factors in the behavior of sects which would have contributed to the emergence of a founder figure for the Q community and a Jesus of Nazareth for Mark's Gospel.

And to those who might wish to claim, as modern trends of thinking increasingly do, that at the base of some of these processes a real human man did exist, even if he was not or never claimed to be the Son of God, I simply say: wait until all the pieces of the puzzle have been examined. You will find that they cannot be assembled in such a fashion.

I : THE JERUSALEM TRADITION

Modern scholars have begun to recognize the great divide between the world of the Gospels and the world of the epistles. Many now postulate that what happened in response to Jesus' ministry in Galilee remained separate from what happened in response to his death in Jerusalem, since the two "Traditions" seem to have so little in common. The documents which supposedly record Jesus' preaching in the towns and countryside of his home province—the Q document imbedded in Matthew and Luke, and the Gospel of Thomas—say nothing about him going to Jerusalem or about anything that happened to him when he got there. There is no reference to a death and resurrection, nor is the Jesus figure found in the Q document given a role as a Savior. On the other side of the divide, the message or "*kerygma*" of apostles like Paul who went about the empire preaching a Son of God has nothing to say about a ministry in Galilee. The epistles attribute no teachings, no miracles, no appointment of apostles, no biographical details to the Christ Jesus they talk about. They focus entirely on the believer's relationship to the heavenly Son and on his redeeming sacrificial death and rising. The latter are never placed in an historical earthly setting.

One final step needs to be taken. Those two sides of the great divide must be severed completely, and regarded as artificially joined for the first time in the Gospel of Mark. That new picture of Christian origins is reflected in the first three divisions of this book.

This first division, the Jerusalem Tradition, will take a close look at the world of the epistles, bringing in other documents from the early Christian record which are a part of that world as well. Part One, "Preaching a Divine Son" (chapters 1 to 5), will lay out the general features of the Son of God faith: how apostles like Paul described their Christ Jesus and his role in salvation, what they taught about ethics and the coming end of the world, how the apostolic movement itself functioned. The background history and spirit of the times which gave rise to the new faith will begin to emerge.

In addition to the self-sufficient picture from writers like Paul about what the movement and its faith constituted, an integral part of this picture will be a demonstration of what it does *not* contain. Since the elements of the Galilean Tradition later assigned to an earthly Jesus, his teachings, miracle working and apocalyptic prophecy, have been misleadingly combined in the Gospels with Paul's Son of God, it needs to be shown that the preaching of the Son as found in the epistles does not contain these things—in some cases, it excludes them. The silence on the general ministry of Jesus and on Jesus as the source of the movement's teachings will be considered at various points in Part One, while the silence on the details of the Gospel story of Jesus' life and death, or indeed on

any biographical details about a human Jesus, will be presented in Part Two, "A Life in Eclipse" (chapters 6 and 7).

Part Three, "The Gospel of the Son," delves into the sources of Paul's view of the heavenly Christ. Chapter 8 will open the pages of the Jewish scriptures, those sacred writings more or less equivalent to the Christian Old Testament, to reveal where Paul got his ideas about crucifixion and resurrection, along with much else. Chapter 9 uncovers the pervasive "intermediary Son" concept in the thinking of the time, the idea of a spiritual emanation of God that served as a channel of contact between Deity and humanity, which philosophers made so much effort to formulate and understand.

Part Four, "A World of Myth and Savior Gods" (chapters 10 to 14), enters the multi-layered universe of the ancients. It will examine their view that a vast unseen dimension lay above the earth, where all sorts of supernatural proceedings took place among gods and spirits. Here lay the processes of salvation, the activities of the Greco-Roman savior gods and other pagan and Jewish mythology about divine figures. Here is where Paul and the early Christians placed their Christ Jesus and his redeeming acts of death and resurrection. We will take a close look at the language used by the epistle writers, terms such as "flesh" and "body" in application to heavenly processes, and the concept of the "heavenly man." In this light, Part Five, "Views Through the Window in Scripture" (chapters 15 to 17), will closely examine key passages in the epistles, such as "born of woman" and the heavenly sacrifice in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Finally, with the workings of the Son of God movement laid out, Part Six, "A Riotous Diversity" (chapters 18 to 21), will make a broad survey of the early Christian landscape, including Gnosticism, and offer a new nativity scene for Christianity's birth. The varied expressions of the Jerusalem Tradition found across the empire will reveal the extent of Christian diversity and the lack of a common founder and point of origin. We will then leave the Son of God movement as it reaches the point at which it stands on the threshold of incorporating an historical Christ, and proceed to Galilee where the human side of what was to become the Gospel Jesus had taken shape.

Part One

PREACHING A DIVINE SON

1

A Heavenly Christ

The New Testament epistles are often described as "occasional writings." That is, each one was written on a particular occasion to deal with a specific situation faced by the writer. Some of these writers, such as Paul, would not have penned their epistles themselves; they dictated them to a scribal companion or professional.

Such a letter might be dashed off overnight, so to speak, with little review or polishing before it was sent on its way; in some cases, a certain amount of care might be taken. On the other hand, a few of the New Testament epistles, such as the Epistle to the Hebrews, are clearly not spur-of-the moment affairs, but carefully constructed little treatises. In the Pauline corpus, one could suggest that Romans and Ephesians fall into such a category, possibly others; some, such as 2 Corinthians, are suspected to be later compilations of earlier separate letters or parts of letters. Finally, the odd epistle, notably 1 John, shows revision over time, a 'layering' of later parts and insertions over earlier ones.

What could one reasonably expect to find in such a motley collection of writings?

First and foremost, these writers are, within the situations their epistles address, discussing their faith, one that centers on the figure they worship. They may not be setting out to present a comprehensive statement of that faith and that figure—although it might be argued that Hebrews does, and to a certain extent Romans. Nevertheless, we should reasonably expect that from this collection of early Christian correspondence (to which one could add Revelation), basic defining doctrines and a background picture of the Christian movement, even if only piecemeal, would emerge.

Yet what, in fact, does emerge?

On the one hand, important fundamentals of doctrine and background, which almost two millennia of Christian tradition would lead us to expect, are entirely missing. Those anxious to protect that tradition lay emphasis on the "occasional" aspect of the writings, as though this should excuse them from containing any of this basic information. On the other hand, the epistle writers seem to be saying things about doctrine and background which present quite a different picture than the one tradition has given us.

Paul began his known career as a persecutor of the Son of God faith, acting on behalf of the Jewish authorities. "How savagely I persecuted the church of God," he tells the Galatians (1:13). Following his conversion, an event about which he reveals very little except that it was a call "by God," he became part of that faith. After a time, he made contact in Jerusalem with a group of "brothers" and apostles which included certain men named Peter and James, "who were apostles before me" (1:17). In 1 Corinthians 15:11-12, he says that "this is what we all proclaim... that Christ was raised from the dead." All are part of the same Jerusalem Tradition, proclaiming salvation through belief in a dying and resurrected Christ, a divinity who is not identified with a recent historical man.

But although this Jerusalem sect around Peter and James was an important force in the Son of God faith and had considerable influence which extended into Syria and sometimes beyond, it was by no means a central authority for all apostles working in the field, or for all the many Christian communities which dotted the eastern empire in the time of Paul. Nor, as indicated earlier, is Jerusalem to be considered as the sole point of origin for the movement.

It also needs to be stressed that the nature of the divine Son being preached could be quite different from one apostle or group to another, from one document to another. While Paul and the Jerusalem sect offered a Son and Christ who had died for sin and risen from death, some of Paul's rivals in the field rejected a dying and rising Christ. They proclaimed a Christ who was a Revealer Son, an imparter of wisdom and knowledge about God, a different means to salvation. Such a clash we see in Paul's defense of "God's wisdom" (meaning his own) in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2. And there were other variations. Here, for the most part, the focus will be on the sacrificial Son found in Paul and most other New Testament epistles, with a glance at the non-sacrificial versions as we go along. It was the Son and Christ Paul preached which eventually defined the theology of Christianity as we know it.

The Documentary Record

In that portion of the New Testament following the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles, there are 22 documents. Most were not written by the authors whose names they bear. Among the thirteen epistles assigned to Paul, scholarly study and computer analysis have judged only seven as genuine to him: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon.⁷ 2 Corinthians is generally judged to be an editing together of at least two separate letters, and 1 Corinthians may also contain splicing and editing. Colossians, Ephesians and 2 Thessalonians were likely written within a decade or two after Paul's death (which presumably took place in the 60s) by followers or members of his congregations. Their authors used Paul's name in order to give their letters greater authority. The three Pastoral epistles (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus) are also in Paul's name, but they present a picture of a later period and are assigned to the early 2nd century, usually 110-130.

The Epistle to the Hebrews is anonymous. Of those under the names of Peter, James, John and Jude, none today are judged to be authentic. That is, they were not written by those legendary followers of Jesus. These epistles too may

originally have been anonymous, or had their original ascriptions dropped; new names were added, possibly at the time the epistles were collected and a canon was being formed (see chapter 30). The term for this custom of adopting the name of a famous figure of the past to give one's writing greater authority is "pseudonymous." (A less kind term is "forgery.")

Dating many of these documents is notoriously difficult, and wide leeways are allowed. Traditional scholarship has tended to date Hebrews and James early—usually before the Jewish War of 66-70. 1 Peter and the three Johns come perhaps in the 80s or 90s. 2 Peter tends to be dated late, 100-130; this requires Jude to be earlier, since some of its passages have been inserted into 2 Peter. Finally, Revelation, apparently written by a prophet named John but who is no longer identified with the Gospel apostle of that name, is placed most often in the mid 90s. While some have given more radical datings to a number of these documents, the standard date ranges held by traditional scholarship are for the most part defensible; I will occasionally argue in their favor through the course of this book. Taken as a whole, then, most of the epistolary corpus predates the Gospels; virtually all of it predates the wider dissemination of those Gospels as perceivable in the record.

As we go along, some early Christian writings that did not end up in the New Testament will be brought in: the epistle 1 Clement, the letters of Ignatius, the "church manual" called the Didache (DID-a-kee), the Shepherd of Hermas, and the epistles of Barnabas and Polycarp, as well as some Jewish and Greco-Roman documents which cast light on the picture. Details and dates of these will be discussed at such times.

All the documents of the New Testament, as well as almost all the non-canonical ones of the first two centuries, were written in Greek, the international language of the time.

A Missing Equation

So let's begin. From the record of what the New Testament epistles do *not* say, we will look at a puzzle piece that may be called "The Missing Equation."

Those 22 documents in the latter part of the New Testament contain almost 100,000 words. They are the product of about a dozen different writers, Paul being the most prominent. In them, one encounters over 500 references to the object of all these writers' faith: "Jesus" or "Christ" or a combination of these names, or "the Son," plus a few to "the Lord" meaning Christ.

Even if these writings are "occasional"—and some of them are more than that—is it feasible that in all this discussion and defense of their faith, nowhere would anyone, by choice, accident or necessity, happen to use words which would identify the divine Son and Christ they are all talking about with his recent incarnation: whether this be the man Jesus of Nazareth known to us from the Gospels, born of Mary and died under Pilate, or some other 'genuine Jesus' unearthed by modern critical scholarship? As astonishing as such a silence may seem, an equation such as "Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God and Messiah" is missing from all the early Christian correspondence. The Jesus of the epistles is not spoken of as a man who had recently lived.

There are two passages in the epistles which present apparent exceptions to what has just been said, plus a third which could be claimed to fall into such a category, and they will be addressed immediately so as not to compromise the argument.

One is 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16. After a statement that the Thessalonian Christians have been mistreated by their fellow countrymen just as the Christians in Judea have been persecuted by their fellow Jews, we read this additional comment about those Jews:

...¹⁵who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and drove us out, the Jews who are heedless of God's will and enemies of their fellow-men, ¹⁶hindering us from preaching to the gentiles to lead them to salvation. All this time they have been making up the full measure of their guilt, and now retribution has overtaken them for good and all. [NEB]

That last sentence would seem to be an obvious allusion to the destruction of Jerusalem, which happened after Paul's death and many years after 1 Thessalonians was written. The sentiments in those two verses are also very uncharacteristic of Paul, in both his language and feelings towards his fellow Jews as expressed elsewhere in his letters. For these reasons, many scholars have judged those verses to be an interpolation, something inserted into the text at a later date. This, by the way, is the only passage in the entire corpus of New Testament epistles which assigns to the Jews any responsibility in the death of the Christ figure. (See Appendix 1 [p.657] for a full discussion of the question of authenticity of this passage.)

The second apparent exception is in 1 Timothy 6:13, a passing reference to Christ making a "confession" before Pontius Pilate. While not so clear-cut a case, some commentators find that this reference does not fit well into its surrounding context; consequently, one may ask whether it was part of the original letter. In any case, since this epistle comes from the early decades of the 2nd century, the reference to Pilate, if part of the original letter, could reflect the newly-developing view that Jesus had lived at Pilate's time and was executed by the Roman governor. (See the second part of Appendix 1 [p.660] for a detailed discussion of this passage; see also note 77.)

The third passage mentioned above is the sole Gospel-like scene to be found in all of Paul's letters: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. Here Paul attributes words to Jesus at what he calls "the Lord's Supper," words identifying the bread and wine of that "supper" with Jesus' body and blood. But is Paul recounting an historical event here? There are several arguments to be made that this is not the case, that Paul is instead describing something which lay in the realm of myth, similar to sacred meal myths found in many of the Greek savior god cults, such as that of Mithras. In fact, the opening phrase of the passage points to Paul's reception of this information through revelation, not through an account of others who were supposedly participants at such an event. This is an important passage, and it will be discussed in fuller detail at several points later. For now, it does not have to be regarded as a necessary reference to an historical Jesus who had lived on earth in Paul's own lifetime.

Thus, we are left with an entire corpus of early Christian correspondence which gives us no indication that the divine Christ these writers look to for salvation is to be identified with the man Jesus of Nazareth whom the Gospels place in the early 1st century—or, indeed, with any man in their recent past.

It is important to realize that the many references in the epistles to the "death" or "rising" of Christ do not, in themselves, have to be references to physical events on earth or in history. They, along with a handful of 'human' sounding terms, can be part of the *myth* of the Son; they relate to the activities of this divinity *in the supernatural realm*. For all its jarring incongruity with our modern outlook, not to mention centuries of tradition about an earthly Jesus, this is a view that would have been perfectly at home in the philosophical and mythical thinking of the time. It was, in fact, a view shared by a whole range of pagan salvation cults, each of which had its own savior god who had performed deeds in the mythical world. Like Paul's Christ, savior gods such as Attis and Osiris had been killed; like Paul's Christ, Osiris had been buried (after being dismembered); like Christ on the third day, Adonis and Dionysos had been resurrected from death. It will be argued that in the cults all these things were not regarded as historical; they had taken place in the Platonic world of myth and higher reality, a world to be looked at in detail in Part Four.

A Starting Point in Heaven

To get a clearer focus on our Missing Equation, let's look at a passage from the Acts of the Apostles, a New Testament document which many scholars now date to the 2nd century and no longer regard as historically reliable (see chapter 30). In Acts 2:22-36, the author puts a speech into the mouth of Peter. Here Peter says: "Men of Israel, hear me. I speak of Jesus of Nazareth, a man singled out by God and made known to you through miracles, portents and signs...." He goes on to tell about this Jesus, concluding with these words: "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

This would surely have been the most natural and inevitable way Christian discussion and preaching would proceed. The movement had supposedly begun as a response to a human man. This man had had such a profound effect on people that they forsook everything in life to preach him; for this man's sake they had abandoned, even betrayed, much that was held sacred in their Jewish heritage. He should have lain at the forefront of their minds. And so Acts would seem to indicate. In speech after speech, the Christian apostles *start* with the man Jesus and make certain factual statements and faith declarations about him.

But what do we find in the letters of Paul and other early writers? They start with the *divine* Christ, the figure of the Son in heaven, and make their faith statements about him. And there is no equation with an historical man, a human teacher and prophet who had recently lived. Paul believes *in* a Son of God, not that anyone *was* the Son of God.

Here is Paul stating a capsule summary of the gospel of salvation he preached to the Corinthians:

...that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures. [1 Cor. 15:3-4]

Is there not something missing here? If Paul tramps into town and begins to preach in the marketplace or the local synagogue, would his listeners, from this, have known that the Christ he is speaking of was a man who had undergone this death and resurrection only a couple of decades ago, on a hill and from a tomb just outside Jerusalem? Would not an essential part of his gospel be the identity of the human incarnation of this Son of God and Christ—or even the fact of the incarnation itself?

But perhaps Paul left out such preliminaries when quoting his capsule gospel. What of his 'definition' of Father and Son in 1 Corinthians 8:6?

For us there is one God, the Father, from whom all being comes...and there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came to be and we through him. [NEB]

This is language very reminiscent of Greek philosophy. But it would seem that a fundamental description of the Son is not to include the fact that he was incarnated in the person of a human Jesus, the man through whom information about the Son was presumably derived. Such an idea Paul never mentions.

Throughout his letters, Paul has much to say about faith. Faith in Jesus as the avenue to eternal life. Faith that God has raised Jesus from the dead. (Even Jesus' death, to judge by some passages, seems to be a matter of faith.) Faith that God has revealed his great mystery about Christ to apostles like himself. But he leaves out what is surely the most important faith of all, the one that comes first, without which none of the others come into play. Paul ignores the requirement that one must have faith that the man Jesus of Nazareth had been the incarnation of the divine, redeeming Son he is preaching.

Some of the epistles contain descriptions of the Son which are quite fantastic. Here is part of the one in Colossians 1:15-20:

He is the image of the invisible God; his is the primacy over all created things. In him everything in heaven and on earth was created...In him, the complete being of God, by God's own choice, came to dwell. Through him God chose to reconcile the whole universe to himself.... [NEB]

Heady stuff, and very closely related to wider philosophical trends of thinking to be examined. Christ is not only the reflection of God, he is the agent through whom all the heavens and the earth have been created. He holds the entire universe together! Yet the writer fails to mention anywhere in his letter that this colossal power had been on earth in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Would not such a bizarre elevation of a crucified criminal to so cosmic a level of divinity be an important point in one's faith declaration? Why is no justification or defense ever offered by any epistle writer for such an unprecedented leap, turning a mere man into a part of the Godhead?

The author of the epistle to the Hebrews also waxes dramatic about the Son:

...whom he (God) has made heir to the whole universe, and through whom he has created all orders of existence: the Son who is the effulgence of God's splendor and the stamp of God's very being, who sustains the universe by his word of power. [1:2-3]

Though this author devotes a dozen chapters to detailing the Son's redeeming activities in a heavenly sanctuary, he never identifies him with the man Jesus of Nazareth or any other human being; nor does he present a sacrifice on Calvary. Though he can quote the Son's words in scripture, the "voice" through which God has spoken in the present age, he never gives his readers a single saying attributed to the Galilean preacher in the Gospels.

These and similar passages in the epistles illustrate the orientation of early Christian thinking. They start with the divine Christ and detail his activities. They do not start with the human man and identify their divine Christ with him, which is the approach we find in Acts.

Starring Jesus in a Mythological Drama

This preliminary dip into the early Christian view of the Son presents a picture which scholars have long found perplexing. The epistles cast Jesus in an exclusively spiritual and mythological⁸ role, while ignoring the fact or identity of his supposed incarnation, the man whose career on earth presumably started it all. Here is how one scholar has put it (Herman Ridderbos, *Paul and Jesus*, p.3):

No one who examines the Gospels, and then reads the epistles of Paul can escape the impression that he is moving in two entirely different spheres.... When Paul writes of Jesus as the Christ, historical and human traits appear to be obscure, and Christ appears to have significance only as a transcendent divine being.

But the question which New Testament scholarship has never asked is the most natural one of all: suppose Paul made no such leap? If all we find in Paul's presentation of Christ is this transcendent divine being whose activities are never linked to history or an earthly location, is there any justification for assuming that Paul's Christ arose out of Jesus of Nazareth, out of the human figure who appears for the first time only in Gospels that were written some time after Paul?

Those who derive their view of Jesus from the Gospels might be startled to realize the highly elevated nature of the Jesus preached by early Christians. He is a part of the very Godhead itself. His nature is integral with that of the Father. And he has been given all the titles previously reserved for God alone.

This Jesus is pre-existent: that is, he existed before all time with the Father, before the very creation of the world. Indeed, it is through him that the world has been created, and he is the energy force through which the workings of the universe are maintained. He also serves as God's redeeming agent in the divine salvation plan, reconciling an estranged universe to God (Colossians 1:20). He is the unifying force of the entire cosmos (Ephesians 1:10). He has subjugated the demon spirits who pervade the world and harass humanity, and he has been given lordship over all earthly and supernatural powers.

This supposed elevation of a human man is quite staggering. To the extent that they are familiar with them, Christians have had almost 2000 years to get used to such lofty ideas. But we lose sight of the fact that if the orthodox picture is correct, someone or some group one day decided to apply all these ideas to a human being for the first time and actually went out and preached them.

Is it possible to conceive of circumstances in which followers of such a man, a humble preacher whose deeds—critical scholars are now agreed—could not possibly have matched those of the Gospel story, would have elevated him to such a cosmic level? Though men, such as the Roman emperors, could be called divine and "sons of God," Jesus' degree of elevation would have been virtually unprecedented in the entire history of religion.⁹

It is especially inconceivable among Jews, who had an obsession against associating anything human with God. He could not be represented by even the suggestion of a human image. Jews in their thousands had bared their necks before Pilate's swords simply to protest against the carrying of Roman military standards bearing human images into the city of Jerusalem. The idea that a man was a literal part of God would have been met by almost any Jew with horror and apoplexy.¹⁰

Yet we are to believe not only that Jews were led to identify a crucified criminal with the ancient God of Abraham, but that they went about the empire and practically overnight converted huge numbers of other Jews to the same outrageous—and thoroughly blasphemous—proposition. Within a handful of years of Jesus' supposed death, we know of Christian communities in many major cities of the empire, all presumably having accepted that a man they had never met or in most cases even previously heard of, crucified as a political rebel on a hill outside Jerusalem, had risen from the dead and was in fact the Son of God and redeemer of the world.

Since many of the Christian communities Paul worked in existed before he got there, and since his letters do not support the picture Acts paints of extensive missionary activity on the part of the Jerusalem group around Peter and James, history does not record who performed this astounding feat.

Moreover, it was apparently done without any need for justification. There is not a murmur in any Pauline letter, nor in any other epistle, about a Christian need to defend such an outlandish doctrine. No one seems to challenge Christian preaching on these grounds, for the point is never addressed. Even in 1 Corinthians 1:18-24, where Paul defends the "wisdom of God" (the message he is preaching) against the "wisdom of the world," he fails to provide any defense for the elevation of Jesus of Nazareth to divinity. He can admit that to the Greeks and Jews the doctrine of the cross—that is, the idea of a crucified Messiah—is "folly" and "a stumbling block." But this has nothing to do with turning a man into God, a piece of folly he never discusses or defends, and a stumbling block no traditional Jew could have circumvented. That his opponents, and the Jewish establishment in general, would not challenge him on this fundamental Christian position, forcing him to provide some justification, is inconceivable.

Scholars have traditionally postulated this rapid application to Jesus of all the going philosophical and mythological concepts of the day. But they are unsure who did it, or why. It was hardly the product of that circle of simple fishermen whom the Gospels place around Jesus, men who would probably have been barely able to read much less understand philosophical concepts like the Greek Logos or Jewish personified Wisdom and decide that the teaching Master they followed had been the very embodiment of these concepts.

More recent scholars, such as Burton Mack (*A Myth of Innocence*, p.96f.; *Who Wrote the New Testament?* p.75f) have suggested that gentile circles in places like Antioch in Syria were responsible over time for applying current philosophical interpretations about the workings of Deity to Jesus of Nazareth, and that Paul was converted to one of these "Christ cults." But this scenario runs into problems. Such groups, being distant from the places of Jesus' ministry and forming after his death, would have had no contact with the man himself. One has to wonder how anyone, gentile or Jew, would have been impelled to create such a cosmic product out of someone they had never laid eyes on. There is no question that what was allegedly made of Jesus owes much to Hellenistic (Greek) ideas, but these ideas not even gentiles had ever applied to an historical person. Thus we can judge that the leap would have been, in its own way, as unprecedented and shocking for them as it would for mainstream Jews.

Moreover, such a proposal founders on a very important consideration. To judge by the chronology he outlines in Galatians 1 and 2, Paul's conversion had to have taken place some time between 32 and 36, only a few years after Jesus' presumed death. Since Paul did not invent the Christ cult (he persecuted such groups, and there are pre-Pauline elements in his letters which are the product of others), it existed at that time—even in Judea itself. And because the evidence in Paul clearly implies that the Jerusalem group thought as he did on the question of Jesus' divinity—suggestions to the contrary notwithstanding¹¹—it must have been thriving even in Jerusalem. Who, then, in the very heart of Israel, had turned Jesus into a cosmic deity and attached Hellenistic mythologies to him virtually as soon as he was laid in his grave? Did Paul, a Jew born and bred as he tells us, simply swallow the whole blasphemous proposition without a murmur of indigestion? There are numerous times in his letters when Paul speaks of personal challenges, struggles with his own demons. Can we think that he would never have mentioned the struggle that was surely attendant on his accepting of the crucified man Jesus as the exalted deity he preaches, the very man whose followers he had formerly persecuted? Did he and so many other Jews allow gentiles—wherever they may have been—to persuade them to betray the most cherished principles of their Jewish heritage and turn a human being into God?

Moreover, the question still needs to be answered: Why? What would have led Paul, or gentiles off in northern Syria, to take a simple preacher whom they knew only by report, and turn him into a cosmic deity—no matter what their diet of Hellenistic ideas? The appeal could not have been in his message and charisma as a teacher, since they immediately stripped off that skin and discarded it. If Paul had no interest in the teacher and his teachings, no interest in the miracle worker or apocalyptic prophet, of what use was this Jesus to him as a candidate for divine redeemer? Both Mack and Robert Funk speak of the Pauline cult's point of departure as the fact of Jesus' "noble death," but noble deaths are common enough in history, including Jewish history, and never before or since have they led to divinization on so exalted a scale. The simple fact of a reputed noble death would hardly have persuaded an educated, observant Jew such as Paul claimed to be, to contravene the most sacred precepts of his heritage and associate this particular man, one he had never met, with God.

In fact, the cultic presentation of Jesus' crucifixion does not fit the "noble death" scenario. The latter is classically of the warrior or teacher who dies for his country, his followers, his teachings. These things focus on a life, a cause; in Judaism, it is invariably for the sake of the Law. This is precisely what is missing in the Pauline Christ cult, which has nothing to do with Jesus' life, teachings or followers. Dying for sin is not in the same category, especially when placed in the spirit realm; this is a mystical, spiritual concept.

There is no denying that the earliest Christian record shows us a Jesus who is presented exclusively in mythological, transcendent terms, with no reference to a human career or earthly teachings and deeds (a silence now to be investigated in detail). But if a group is going to elevate its teacher to divinity and apply every philosophical concept of the day to him, why would it at the same time strip away everything to do with the human life he had lived, the life that supposedly had engendered their response to him in the first place? Why would it create mythological statements, hymns and creeds about him which contained not a single identifiable reference to an earthly presence and identity?

If, as most scholars tend to claim, the mythological overlay—the divinity, the pre-existence, the unifying force to a sundered universe, the redemptive significance—is an "interpretation" of the man Jesus of Nazareth, how are we to understand it as such when the object of the interpretation is never mentioned? Since the epistle writers themselves give us no hint that they are "interpreting" a human man, are not scholars guilty of 'reading into' the documents things they wish to see there, rather than what the documents actually say?

Would it not make better sense to view that earliest record as representing a belief in a spiritual entity that was a *version* of the prevailing myths and thought patterns of the day, something upon which an historical garment was eventually hung?

A Conspiracy of Silence

If we had no other documentary record than the New Testament epistles, we would probably regard the Son of God preached by apostles like Paul as a divine being like all the other gods of the day, or indeed of any day: confined to the supernatural dimension and communicating with believers and spokespersons through inspiration, visions and other spiritual manifestations. This is the way gods have been perceived to interact with the world from time immemorial. Paul's Christ would have been no different and no more difficult to comprehend.

But if, on the basis of the later Gospel record, it is claimed that Paul and his colleagues are speaking of a human man who was recently on earth and set the new faith in motion, how is one to account for their silence on such a man and his life? We might, in tongue-in-cheek fashion, suggest that this silence is so profound that it could only be explained as a deliberate, universal conspiracy.

The Argument from Silence

What conclusions can be drawn from silence? Is the "argument from silence" valid? It depends on certain factors. We need to ask: how compelling to the writer would the subject have been? Does what he is saying invite a natural, even inevitable reference to the subject, whether in passing or as an integral part of his argument? If, for example, a Christian writer is urging a certain course of action upon his readers, and the founder of the movement was known to have taught that very thing, this should almost guarantee that the writer would quote the founder, or mention that he had so taught, to lend weight and persuasion to his argument. In other words, the more we have reason to expect that something would be mentioned and yet it is not, the more we are entitled to conclude from the silence that the subject is not known to the writer.

If that strange and unexpected silence extends to many different writers and many documents, indeed to all writers and documents available from that period, if it extends to a multitude of elements on the subject, the greater becomes the evidential force of that silence. If the silence covers every single element, the conclusions to be drawn become compelling.

Let's take an analogy. If a deceased man's descendants claim that the man once won a lottery, yet there is no contemporary record of such a win, no entry of a large sum in his bank statements, no mention of it in his diaries and letters or the letters of his siblings and children, no memory of a spending spree, if on his deathbed he told someone he never got a break in his life, we would have good reason to use the argument from silence to say that the claim must be false, that he had never won a lottery. (If his descendants claim that their own lives are a result of that lottery win, we would be led to say that they are mistaken.)

But what if we could go further and see that the way the writers speak of certain things virtually *excludes* any room or role for the subject in question? In other words, we not only have a negative silence, we have filling it, occupying its space, a positive picture which is sufficient in itself, a picture which by its very nature precludes the things it is silent on. In that case, logic would compel us to postulate that the subject, in these writers' minds and experience, could not have existed.

If the early Christian record presents us with such a positive picture, and such a compelling and inexplicable void on the Gospel Jesus, how likely is it, in view of this two-sided coin, that such a man as the Gospels tell of, even reduced to human fundamentals, could really have lived?

Jesus in Eclipse

The Christian movement began with Jesus the teacher. Or so modern scholars now tell us. Even though there are no early surviving documents which provide this information, an "authentic" Jesus, they claim, can be excavated from the later evidence—despite the difficulties that this two-centuries-long search (and counting) has proven to entail. That evidence will be looked at in due course. Here we need to examine the evidence we *do* have from the early period (it does not include the Gospels) and see if it is possible to reconcile it with such a claim.

While some scholarship maintains that Paul did have an interest in the historical Jesus and did preach him, we will start with the traditional view, which acknowledges that he seems to have done neither. The reasons put forward to explain Paul's silence about the human Jesus are several: he felt no interest in the man and his career, he had no use for any aspect of Jesus' earthly life in his cosmic theology about the risen Christ, he was in competition with the Jerusalem apostles and so chose to downplay the advantages they enjoyed as followers of Jesus on earth, and so on. Regardless of the credibility of such explanations—to be considered as we go along—other factors can be offered which should have been in play to counter this deliberate ignoring of the human man by such as Paul.

One reason is that he could never have gotten away with it in his missionary activities. If Paul were preaching a man who was God, his listeners and converts would have demanded to know about the life of this man, his sayings and deeds. Whether he liked it or not, Paul would have had to make an effort to learn a certain amount of information about Jesus' life. It would have become one of the subjects of discussion between himself and his congregations, details of which would certainly have surfaced in his letters. None do. (See Appendix 2 [p.662] for a hypothetical conversation between Paul and a group of new converts, which illustrates the impossibility that Paul could have ignored the earthly life of Jesus in his preaching mission.)

If the elevation of a man to the status of God were a part of the new faith, the challenge from the Jewish authorities would have required a knowledge and promotion of the man himself and his career in order to try to defend such an offensive elevation. The need to appeal to the superior nature of his teachings, his unusual miracles, his prophetic abilities, not to mention the details of his

atonement death and the circumstances of his resurrection, would have been inevitable. If an apostle like Paul were seeking to convince potential converts that they should believe him—rather than run him out of town tarred and feathered—when he claimed that a crucified man back in Judea was actually the Son of God and had walked out of his tomb, it would be absolutely necessary that he present the man: his character, his words, his deeds.

First of all, there is not much opportunity in evidence for Paul to have acquired such details about Jesus' life, for in Galatians 1 and 2 he tells us that over the course of the 17 years following his conversion, he bothered to go up to Jerusalem exactly once, for a two-week visit. All he did at that time, so he says (1:18), was "get to know Peter" and see James. Did they give him a quick course in their memories of Jesus' life and ministry? Paul gives no hint of such a thing, and no details are ever relayed to his readers.

I have touched on the need Paul would have faced to defend the Christian elevation of a mortal to divinity, especially in light of Jewish sensibilities. No defense is ever offered. With gentile listeners, the situation would have been rather different. The elevation of a human being to such cosmic status would, in the Greco-Roman world, also have been unprecedented and required defending, but not because pagans would have been offended. Quite the contrary. They had a longstanding fascination for the heroic figure known as the "divine man" (*theios aner*) an outstanding ruler or philosopher whose career demonstrated superior wisdom, superhuman qualities (including miracle-working) and a kinship with the gods. The Gospel Jesus of Nazareth would have fitted into this category very well. In any mission to the gentiles, the human Jesus and his exploits would have been a tremendous asset. This makes Paul's total silence on the career of Jesus, his miracles and innovative teachings, quite inexplicable.

Christianity was also in competition with the Greco-Roman mystery cults. Most of the latter's savior gods (Osiris, Isis, Attis, Mithras, etc.) bestowed benefits similar to those enjoyed by devotees of Christ. A very important benefit was protection against the hostile demon spirits that were believed by Jew and pagan alike to pervade the world's very atmosphere, harassing and crippling people's lives, responsible for sickness and misfortune.

Yet the writers of Colossians and Ephesians, who have a special interest in these matters, fail to point out that, unlike the other savior deities, Christ had recently been incarnated in flesh and blood. He had experienced and countered such demonic forces first hand, on earth. He had demonstrated his power over the spirits through his healings, exorcising them from sick people. This is one of the purposes such miracles serve in the Gospels. In his ministry, the Gospels portray Jesus (along with quite different character traits) as showing compassion, tolerance, generosity, all those things men and women thirsted for in confronting a hostile, uncaring world. It is simply unthinkable that, if these traditions existed, Paul or anyone else would have ignored or lost interest in all these advantages provided by the life of the human Jesus when presenting to their listeners, gentile or Jew, the Christian agent of salvation.¹³

And yet every aspect of that life, for the circles Paul moved in, seems to have gone into total eclipse.

Searching for the Jewish Rabbi

Just how dark is that shadow? Can any glimmer of light be uncovered?

What did Jesus teach? The Jesus Seminar¹⁴ rejected as inauthentic some three quarters of the sayings attributed to him in the Christian record. Even the famous "love your neighbor" commandment which Christians have always regarded as a centerpiece of Jesus' teachings—even if he is consciously quoting the biblical book of Leviticus—was judged as not very likely. What do the New Testament epistles have to say?

Throughout this book, in the course of examining the silence in the epistles on the life and teachings of Jesus, we will look at all of the Gospel elements, without discrimination. This will include those which critical scholarship has cast doubt on, or even totally rejected—such as the apocalyptic sayings or the existence of Judas. Those who consider elements like these to be unhistorical may not regard the silence about them in the epistle writers to be compelling evidence that no Jesus existed. But if *none* of the sayings and deeds of Jesus found in the Gospels are attributed to him in the epistles and other early documents, this will indicate that (a) the Gospels cannot be guaranteed to provide reliable historical data, and thus (b) the fundamental basis for the historicity of Jesus—namely the Gospels, since he appears nowhere else in the surviving early record—has been seriously undermined.

If, in addition, no earthly teachings and no biographical details of any kind are to be found, we are entitled to take this as strong evidence that the epistle writers know of no such things, and that the faith movement they represent is not based on the career of a recent human man.

On the other hand, the vast majority of Christians still believe that most of the Gospel picture *is* reliable, including the fact that Jesus taught about love. If he did, we face a perplexing situation in regard to passages like James 2:8: "If you are observing the sovereign law laid down in scripture, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' that is good." Here the writer draws no attention to Jesus' emphasis on this commandment. Twice does Paul similarly express himself just as Jesus is reported to have done, and speaks of the whole Law being "summed up" in the two-edged rule of loving God and loving one's neighbor (Romans 13:9 and Galatians 5:14). But he seems to have no idea that he is imitating any preaching of Jesus. In fact, in 1 Thessalonians 4:9 he makes this astonishing statement to his readers: "You are taught *by God* to love one another" [my emphasis],

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." These memorable lines open Jesus' most famous sermon, as presented in the Gospel of Matthew. Yet the writer of James can say (2:5), without any attribution to Jesus: "Listen, my friends. Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and inherit the kingdom?" One would think that he would wish to use Jesus' own words (ones the Jesus Seminar judged are probably authentic) to press his argument more forcefully upon his listeners.

No less famous is Jesus' dictum to "love your enemies." "Turn the other cheek," says Matthew 5:39. These are sayings the Seminar judged most likely to be authentic. Yet 1 Peter (3:9) can urge its readers: "Do not repay wrong with

wrong, or abuse with abuse; rather, retaliate with blessing." How could this writer fail to draw on Jesus' own teaching here—or be ignorant of it?

Paul in Romans 4:13 says, "Let us cease judging one another." 1 John 3:22 declares, "We can approach God and obtain from him whatever we ask." "Humble yourselves before God and he will exalt you," advises James 4:10. Here are ringing echoes of Jesus' Gospel teachings, yet not one of these writers points to Jesus as their source. Such examples could be multiplied by the dozen.

How have scholars dealt with all this silence in the epistles on the teaching Jesus? Commentaries are witness to perplexed observations like that of Helmut Koester in *Ancient Christian Gospels* (p.68): "It is surprising that there is no appeal [in 1 Timothy] to the authority of Jesus." Graham Stanton (*Gospel Truth*, p.130-1) talks of "allusions" to Jesus' teachings in Paul, but admits that in these "it is difficult to be certain that the phrase or sentence comes from Jesus, rather than from a Jewish or Greek source... Paul's failure to refer more frequently and at greater length to the actions and the teaching of Jesus is baffling... In a number of places in his writings Paul fails to refer to a saying of Jesus at the very point where he might well have clinched his argument by doing so."

Formal compendiums of ethical maxims which bear a strong resemblance to Jesus' Gospel teachings, such as the "Two Ways" instructions found in the Didache and the epistle of Barnabas, or the directives in Romans 12 and 13, are never identified as coming from Jesus. The inevitable conclusion must be that such ethics came from other sources, or were part of the general stock of ethical material of the times, and were only later attributed to an historical Jesus.

Paul's letters contain debates about the necessity to apply Jewish practice to the Christian sects. Were the strict dietary regulations urged by the Pharisees, with their obsessive concerns over the purity of certain foods, still to apply? This was a burning issue in the new faith movement. Paul in Romans 14:14 declares: "As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself" [NIV]. If ever there were a moment when one would expect Paul to seize on Jesus' own declared position for support, this is it. His silence can only indicate that he is truly ignorant of such traditions as those in Mark 7:14-23 where Jesus accuses the Pharisees of hypocrisy and tells the people: "Nothing that goes into a man from outside can defile him." The evangelist drives home the point by concluding, "Thus he declared all foods clean."

Paul's ignorance is shared by the writer of 1 Timothy who fails to draw on support from Jesus when he asserts, in a discussion about foods, that "everything that God created is good." The 2nd century epistle of Barnabas devotes a full chapter to discrediting the Jewish dietary restrictions, yet not even here does a Christian writer who knows his traditional Jewish scriptures inside and out refer to Jesus' own Gospel words on the subject.

The question about foods was only one part of that central dispute which in the time of Paul threatened to tear the fledgling movement apart. As a sect within Judaism, was the observance of the Mosaic Law (the commandments contained in the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Hebrew bible) in all its details to be required of Christianity, especially of its gentile converts who could be less than enthusiastic—if they were male—about such necessities as circumcision? Paul

knew that the success of the new movement in the gentile world hinged on this question, and here he drew his line in the sand. The Jewish/Mosaic Law, he declared, had been superseded.

And what had Jesus to say on this crucial issue? The question is never raised by Paul or his opponents. The decree placed in Jesus' mouth in Matthew 5:18 and Luke 16:17, that not a dot or stroke of the Law can lose its force, comes from Q. This would have destroyed Paul's position, yet no one mentions it.

But regardless of whether Jesus actually said something on an important issue like the continued applicability of the Law, it can confidently be stated that it would not have taken long for one side or the other in the debate to say that he *did*. If the founder of the movement had been a dynamic and respected teacher, it would have been inevitable, when disputes like this arose, that pronouncements on such subjects would be invented and placed in his mouth. (This is exactly what we find in abundance once the Gospel Jesus entered the picture.) Yet the New Testament epistles offer no hint of such a thing.

All this silence does not prevent scholars from declaring that they can detect "echoes" of Jesus' teachings in Paul—even if he never attributes such things to a preaching Jesus. Appealing to those 'allusions' is part and parcel of the claim that Paul did know of an historical Jesus, had an interest in his teachings and person, and that the man did indeed figure in his apostolic message. To examine this claim we will turn to the case essayed by Paul Rhodes Eddy and Gregory Boyd in their 2007 book. *The Jesus Legend*, perhaps the most significant apologetic work of recent memory and one which seriously grapples with elements of the mythicist viewpoint. We will later consider some of their arguments in regard to Paul knowing of the events of Jesus' life and death; here we will focus on his knowledge of Jesus' teachings.

Words of the Lord

As do so many others, Eddy and Boyd seek to refute the observation that Paul never cites Jesus' teaching by first appealing to the so-called "words of the Lord." Four times Paul speaks of information he has received "from the Lord." 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 is an apocalyptic oracle about what will happen to living and dead Christians at the time of the Lord's coming, expected soon. It has no specific parallel in the Gospels. 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 and 9:14 are presented by Paul as 'rulings' from the Lord about community practice, the first that husbands and wives must not divorce, the second that apostles proclaiming the gospel message should be remunerated for their work. Both have parallels in the Gospels, but the wordings are dissimilar.

Is Paul offering these things as pronouncements of the earthly Jesus, words he knows through others who heard Jesus' own instructions? Rather, a line of scholarly thought identifies these passages as reflecting a phenomenon common in early Christian preaching. Prophets like Paul were inspired through visions, through study of scripture, through interpreting glossolalia (speaking in tongues). They made pronouncements which came, as they imagined it, directly from the spiritual Christ in heaven. Paul is passing on to his readers directives and promises he has received through revelation.¹⁵ (Whether this is to be regarded as

the source of the fourth passage in this category, Paul's 'report' of Jesus' words at the "Lord's Supper" in 1 Corinthians 11:23f, will be examined later.)

The fact is, Paul's own language points to a heavenly source for his "words of the Lord." Consider what he says a few verses after his directive against divorce, in 1 Corinthians 7:25:

Now concerning virgins [i.e., celibacy among men] I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy. [NASB]

The first-person phrasing indicates a general category of things Paul is accustomed to possessing for himself, not as part of a wider community knowledge or inheritance from tradition. In offering his own opinion, its value is based entirely on his sense of personal worth and reliability in the eyes of God.

In two other passages, the channel is clearly between the Lord and Paul directly. Eddy and Boyd (p.203) admit that in 1 Corinthians 14:37 "it appears that Paul is passing on a revelatory command he believed he received from the risen Christ":

Anyone who claims to be a prophet, or to have spiritual powers, must acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord.

And that Paul thinks to hear the voice of Jesus directly is to be seen from 2 Corinthians 12:8-9 and Galatians 1:12:

Three times I begged the Lord to rid me of (a bodily pain), but his answer was: "My grace is all you need; power comes to its full strength in weakness."

I received (my gospel) by revelation from Jesus Christ. [NIV]

When we come to note that there is specific reference in other early Christian works to direct revelation from the spiritual Christ to earthly believers—at the opening of Revelation, in Hebrews 2:3-4, in the prologue of 1 John—there is no reason to deny the same phenomenon to Paul.

Ascending to Meet the Lord

The apocalyptic coming of Jesus in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 is another "word of the Lord" Eddy and Boyd claim is based on the prophetic teaching of Jesus on earth. But the "distinctive apocalyptic images" Paul uses, while found in the Gospels, are also found elsewhere; things like the sounding of trumpets, descents on clouds with angels, the gathering of the elect, are part of the common parlance of the time in both scripture (such as Daniel) and sectarian writings (such as the Apocalypse of Zephaniah). There is no need to postulate Pauline dependence on Jesus here and in other similar cases.

Eddy and Boyd several times appeal to identical words and phrases between Paul and the recorded Jesus tradition of the Gospels, as in the "come out to meet him (*eis apantesin*)" of both 1 Thessalonians 4:17 and Matthew 25:6, the latter's eschatological parable of the ten virgins. But that would require an extraordinary convergence of 'tradition': two words used by Paul with two words supposedly preserved over a half-century in oral transmission between a parable of Jesus

(even were it authentic, which is not likely) and their 'recording' (solely) in the Gospel of Matthew. These are efforts strained in the extreme. In fact, Eddy and Boyd—due to the necessity to explain why things like Paul's words of Jesus at his Lord's Supper differ from their Gospel counterparts—here contradict their earlier judgment that "appropriate to an orally dominant culture... (it is) primarily 'things,' not necessarily 'words,' (that) are remembered" (*op.cit.*, p.218).

Allusions and Echoes

From those few examples of what are claimed to be specific attribution, Eddy and Boyd go on to present (p.226-8) a lengthy list of "distinctive parallels" between the Pauline corpus and the Jesus tradition represented in the Gospels, the so-called "echoes" of Jesus' teachings that are sounded without attribution: from "we are to bless those who do us wrong and love our enemies" to "faith can move mountains" to "cataclysmic events will precede the second coming." To them, this signifies that

Paul was by no means unaware of the oral Jesus tradition. To the contrary, his thought seems to be permeated with it.

And yet, this view is seriously compromised by a number of things. One is that too often the "parallel" in the epistles has been identified as derived from scripture, not oral tradition. In Galatians 3:1 Of, it is scripture that is drawn on to make points about Jesus' death. In 1 Timothy 5:18, those who work at preaching are to be paid, not because Jesus said (as allegedly in 1 Corinthians 9:14) that those who do so should earn their living by the gospel, but because "Scripture says: 'the workman deserves his wages'." To identify the latter as Luke 10:7 is ill-advised, since a writer near the beginning of the 2nd century is not likely to identify the Gospel of Luke as scripture, if he even knew of it or had it even been written by then. The epistle of James, a compendium of Jesus-like teachings with not a single attribution to him, more than once identifies a source as scripture (2:8, 4:6). Are we to believe that several writers are willing to cite scripture as their source in some cases (even when a corresponding teaching supposedly existed in the Jesus tradition), but never cite Jesus in so many other cases in which he is alleged to be the source?

Eddy and Boyd also attempt a dubious method to explain Paul's failure to specifically cite Jesus as the source of his allusions. They allege that just as Paul's thought seems permeated with the oral Jesus tradition, we can presume that "the same is true of the congregations he was writing to" (p.228). In other words, everyone already knew that all these echoes were of Jesus himself, so that there was no need for anyone to specify him as the source. This was part of the ancient world's "traditional referentiality" in which what is actually said is only a small part of the wide range of understanding and response which lies behind it. But it seems strange that the 'unsaid' part consistently entails the source in Jesus. It rarely seems to entail sources in the Hebrew bible, for these are given all over the place, even though we can presume that Paul's audiences would have been even more familiar with such biblical understandings behind the words, which should have made it unnecessary to quote and cite them. It is only in

regard to "the elliptical manner in which Paul uses the Jesus tradition (in which he was no doubt steeped)" that this "communicative fare is common."

In any case, are we justified in thinking that Paul's audiences were indeed "steeped" in Jesus traditions—only two decades after the man's death, and in every community across half the empire to which Paul, and others, are writing? Moreover, just how were those congregations to *become* steeped in the Jesus tradition if no one ever cited it as such? Does not the very fact of the continued existence of debates on important questions which should have been resolved by Jesus' teachings suggest that the parties were anything *but* thoroughly familiar with those teachings? When viewed from such angles, the arguments of Eddy and Boyd—and those scholars to whom they appeal—simply break down. They also ignore the further consideration that citation of Jesus himself would add an emotional and persuasive element to what is being said (precisely *because* of its familiarity), just as it has done ever since the Gospels were disseminated and the "Jesus tradition" within them became familiar to Christian believers.

The 'Silence' in Acts

Eddy and Boyd are not the first to point to Acts as an example of a Christian writing which does not appeal to the teachings of Jesus in regard to certain issues, even though it is undeniable that the author should have known of those teachings, especially if he also wrote the Gospel of Luke, itself a rich repository of Jesus traditions. In regard to the latter consideration, it is by no means sure that the two documents are by the same author, as we shall see; but this is beside the point here, since if Acts was written well into the 2nd century by an ecclesiastical writer, as many now postulate, its author would have been familiar with Luke—indeed, he would have performed a certain amount of redaction on it at the same time—and likely familiar with another Gospel or two as well. But the problem with this argument is that the circumstances are entirely different.

Paul and other epistle writers are currently living the issues they are debating, which would make an appeal to Jesus' teachings readily applicable. Acts is not. Rather, it is recounting supposed history. Those issues are no longer active; they have presumably been settled. It then becomes a question of why the author did not portray those issues as having been resolved *in the past* by an appeal to the teachings of Jesus. It is hardly relevant to point out the lack of appeal to those teachings *at the time of the writing of Acts*.

There are two such issues in Acts, perhaps the two most important in the early days of the Christian movement. The first is recounted in 10:9-16. There Peter receives a vision of animals which he is directed to slaughter and eat; when he objects that he cannot eat what is unholy and unclean, he is told by a voice in the vision that nothing is unholy which God has created. No teaching of Jesus to this effect is recorded as having been appealed to. In chapter 15, Acts tells of the conference of apostles and elders in Jerusalem over what gentile converts were required to do in regard to the Law of Moses. Paul argues that the Law's onerous burden should not be laid on gentile shoulders, and the gathering, appealing to scripture, agrees on a list of less strict minimum requirements. No record is offered of any mention having been made about Jesus' views on the matter of the

Law, much less his very strict specification that the Law needed to be observed in all its aspects, as in Matthew 5:18.

If the author of Acts is reflecting earlier traditions or drawing on sources, then he is recounting how such issues had been resolved. In fact, we already know from various early epistles that such disputes involved appeals to scripture and revelation from the Spirit; those were the two bases on which key issues had previously been debated, with no appeal to Jesus himself. The writer of Acts, reflecting that memory, seems to be doing nothing less than portraying history as it actually was. If he had not been drawing on preserved memories and traditions about appeals to scripture and revelation, then he might have portrayed such issues as having been resolved according to what may have become the practice of his own time (mid 2nd century), namely an appeal to the teachings of Jesus as found in the Gospels. But he does not. Thus, he would seem to be confirming that the earlier times contained no authoritative teachings by Jesus available to settle those disputes, which is the conclusion we have been drawing from the great void in the non-Gospel record on the appeal to such teachings.

The extent of any practice of appealing to the Gospel Jesus at the time of the writing of Acts cannot be determined, since so few documents of that period even mention the Gospels at all. In the epistle 2 Clement (really a sermon), which has been loosely dated toward the middle of the century, there are many appeals to sayings of Jesus (but no biographical elements). Yet a specific Gospel source is never identified, and attribution is mixed. At times it is "scripture also says," as in the quote of "I came not to call righteous, but sinners" (2:4, cf. Mk. 2:17). In 3:2 Christ is appealed to as saying, "Whosoever confesses me before men, I will confess him before my Father" (cf. Mt. 10:32), but then (3:5) Christ "says also" a verse from Isaiah, referring to the phenomenon we will examine of Christ speaking out of scripture. A few sayings resemble those in the Gospel of Thomas, and by referring (8:5) to "the Lord says in the gospel," the writer may be using as one of his sources a sayings collection attributed to a Jesus figure. That collection, however, reflects no canonical source, for the saying "It is no credit to you if you love them that love you, but it is a credit to you if you love your enemies and those that hate you" (13:4, cf. Lk. 6:32) is something "God says." In 2 Clement we seem to be seeing a changeover from a spiritual Christ speaking through revelation to one who "became flesh" (9:5) and spoke on earth.

Thus we have concluded that Paul (along with other early epistle writers) has no sense of Jesus as a recent ethical teacher. Rather, Christ is a divine presence in Christian communities, bestowing revelation and guidance, a channel to God and to knowledge of spiritual truths. Christ has taken up residence in Christian believers themselves. It is the voice of this spiritual Son which Christians hear, not the passed-on words of a former rabbi. And as we shall see, his very words can be read in scripture, God's way of revealing new truths to humanity.

All this is Paul's world. God and the heavenly Christ have been working through the Holy Spirit on men such as himself, and on believers who respond to them in faith. In the next chapter will look at how Paul and the other writers describe this action of the Spirit, and how they have learned about the Son.

3

A Thirst for the Irrational

In 334 BCE, when Alexander the Great led his army of Macedonians out of Greece and into Asia, he faced the ancient empire of the Persians and an even more ancient Oriental world with deep social and religious roots. Ten years later, when he reached Babylon after a path of conquest which swung as far east as India, the Persian empire lay in ruins and that ancient world was already being inundated by Greeks: Greek colonies, Greek ideas, Greek culture. The new ruling class formed a veneer which never fully integrated with the native populations, but the mix inevitably produced a new culture. Predominantly Greek, infused with the old still-vital bloods, the eastern Mediterranean world embarked on the Hellenistic age. Its spirit lasted even into the era of imperial Rome, whose own culture continued to borrow heavily from the Greek east.

Alexander's grand vision of a unified world of East and West was stillborn, for at the age of 33 in 323, weakened by wounds and exhaustion, he died of fever in Babylon after a drinking party. His generals fought for the spoils and the sprawling, short-lived empire broke up. The more easterly regions were almost immediately lost, but the rest solidified into three and eventually four kingdoms. War between them was prevalent; areas frequently changed hands between one kingdom and another. Old social cohesions crumbled in the new unstable political situation. The Oriental temple-state form of nationalism gave way to one modeled on the Greek city-state, but without its former universal (male) democracy. Vast numbers of people felt lost and disenfranchised. Many had been displaced, and there was nothing familiar to return to. That ancient world was now bewilderingly multi-cultural. The individual was on his or her own.

Transcending the World

Formerly, religion had been tied to the state, an expression of the state's interests. People took part in it as members of a larger whole. But in the Hellenistic age, the focus of religion changed to one of personal concerns. With the world around them unsettled and fragmented, people felt a greater thirst for understanding that world and how to cope with it. But even more so, how to transcend it.

Instead of the pursuit of philosophy for the sake of pure truth and to further the health of the state, as Plato and Aristotle had largely indulged in it, philosophical movements were now designed to help individuals find a place in a troubled world and give them peace of mind. The most important were the Stoics, Epicureans and Platonists. These and other systems had as a central concern the nature of Deity and how one should relate to it (or ignore it), together with the question of proper and beneficial behavior. Only in Stoicism

was there any significant focus on taking an active part in public life; otherwise, the principal goal was to achieve freedom and self-sufficiency from the world.

Such doctrines were preached by wandering philosophers. They were a kind of "popular clergy," offering spiritual comfort—though usually demanding a fee. Some had immense influence on a wide audience, such as the Stoic philosopher Epictetus, who taught that the universe is governed by a benevolent and wise Providence, and that all men are brothers (in the sexist language of the time).

But philosophical advice was not the only thing people had recourse to. Healing gods, astrologers, magicians with their potions and spells, helped cope with evil forces in the world, and not only human ones. The conviction that unseen spirits and forces of fate were also working against them added to people's distress. Demons were regarded as filling the very atmosphere of the earth and were thought to cause most misfortunes, from personal accidents and sickness to natural disasters. They even tempted the believer away from his faith.

Like the savior gods of the mystery cults, Christ Jesus offered deliverance from these evil forces, for the sacrificed god of the Christians was said to have placed all the supernatural powers of the universe under his subjection.

Some of the new Greek philosophical systems would have nothing to do with such superstitions. Stoicism and Epicureanism began as essentially rationalist philosophies. They aimed at living life according to Nature or to some rational principle by which the observable world could be understood or at least coped with. Views of Deity were fitted into this "natural" outlook. But during the 1st century BCE a fundamental shift developed, and it coincided with the revival of Platonism which had lain, to a certain extent, in eclipse for a couple of centuries. In this new outlook, says John Dillon (*The Middle Platonists*, p.192), "the supreme object of human life is Likeness to God, not Conformity with Nature." Middle Platonism, which soon came to dominate philosophical thinking in the era of early Christianity, was fundamentally religious and even mystical. A. J. Festugiere (*Personal Religion Among the Greeks*, p.51) describes it as embodying a desire to escape: "Ah! To leave this earth, to fly to heaven, to be like unto the Gods and partake of their bliss."

This was the great religious yearning of the age: to undergo transformation, to transport oneself into a new world, an immortal life, union with the divine in a metamorphosed universe. The new buzzword was "salvation." The ways to achieve it became the central concern of a proliferation of schools and cults, both Hellenistic and Jewish.

Higher and Lower Worlds

It is largely to Plato (who absorbed earlier ideas from the mystery religion known as Orphism) and to the stream of later "Platonic" thinking which he set in motion, that we owe this sense of alienation from the world and the urge to move beyond it. In Platonism, there was a clear separation between the higher world (above the earth) of spiritual ultimate realities, where things were perfect and unchanging, and the earthly world of matter and the senses of which humans were a part. As an imperfect reflection of the upper one, comprised of things that were changing and perishable, this lower world was decidedly inferior. Human

beings possessed a portion of the higher reality in that part of themselves called the "soul." It had existed before birth and been a part of the spiritual world. Now it was trapped in bodies of matter, but ultimately it would achieve release and reunite with the divine. The soul was immortal. Through the soul, the human being was destined to merge into some larger life.

Thus Christian ideas could show a respectable lineage for their division between the soul and the body, between the lower world and the higher, between this world and the future one—none of which was based on any observable evidence. By the time we get to Paul, Greek rationalism as embodied most fully in the Stoics is being openly maligned. It is "the wisdom of the world" which God has revealed (through apostles like Paul) to be foolishness.

Nor was human reason any longer the way to achieve the new wisdom. This too was a folly and even amenable to evil influence. The need for salvation could not be based on something as mundane as the power of the human mind to reason. In a sense, people looked for salvation from the limitations and weaknesses of being human, of living in an all-too-human world. The means to that salvation must therefore lie outside themselves, it had to be part of the thing being aimed at. Knowledge of salvation and the ways to achieve it could only come from God, through faith that he was providing these things.

People became convinced that they were receiving direct revelation from the Deity, through visions and ascents to heaven in dreams, through inspired understanding of sacred writings, through personal calls to preach. God was working in the world, and one need only attune oneself to him. The certainly that could not come from human reason came instead through faith.

Christianity and other Jewish apocalyptic sects, more mainstream Jewish proselytizing activities, various pagan salvation cults, all had their apostles tramping the byways of the empire, offering brands of redemption and future exaltation for the individual believer. By the middle decades of the 1st century, the Hellenistic world, in the phrase of John Dillon (*op.cit.*, p.396), was "a seething mass of sects and salvation cults," operating amid a broader milieu of ethical and philosophical schools only a little less emotionally conducted. Stepping onto that stage is the first witness to the Christian movement, one who left us with the earliest surviving record of belief in a new Savior and system of salvation: the wandering apostle Paul.

The Spirit of God

When Paul steps onto that stage, where is he coming from? Has he been inspired by the career of the man he supposedly preaches? Does he see himself as carrying on Jesus' work? Is he part of a movement which traces its doctrines and authority back to the Son of God on earth?

There is no sign of such a thing, in Paul or any other epistle writer. Instead, Paul is driven by inspiration, and that inspiration comes through the Spirit of God. He tells us this over and over.

It is all God's doing. God has set his seal on us by sending the Spirit. [2 Corinthians 1:22, NEB]

We speak of these gifts of God in words found for us not by our human wisdom but by the Spirit. [1 Corinthians 2:13, NEB]

Did the word of God originate with you? Are you the only people to whom it came? If anyone claims to be inspired or a prophet, let him recognize that what I write has the Lord's authority. [1 Corinthians 14:36-37, NEB]

Elsewhere, the same sentiments can be noted. The writer of 1 Peter 1:12 tells his readers: "Preachers brought you the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven." This is a preaching movement begun and inspired by God, by revelation through the Spirit. There is not a word spent on any role for a human Jesus, on a beginning in the career of a recent historical man.

2 Corinthians 5:5 should astound us: "God has shaped us for life immortal, and as a guarantee of this he has sent the Spirit." How could Paul not have said that to give us life everlasting, God had sent Jesus? God, through the avenue of the Spirit, is the sole agent in all that has transpired, the sole source. It is he who has bestowed grace, his are the gifts. Romans 1:2 speaks of the "gospel of God," 3:24 of "God's act of redemption." It is God "who began the good work" as declared in Philippians 1:6. Hebrews 13:7 refers to the apostles "who first spoke God's message to you."

So many writers pointedly ignore the centrality of Jesus' own role and actions. As late as 1 Timothy, the writer speaks (1:11) of "the gospel which tells of the glory of God who is blessed." Such silences resound throughout the early Christian correspondence, with a cumulative impact which cannot be dismissed.

Revealing the Secret of God's Son

What is it that the Spirit of God, through revelation, has imparted to men like Paul? In referring to his conversion experience, Paul tells the Galatians:

God chose to reveal his Son in me [to me and through me: NEB], in order that I might preach him among the gentiles. [1:16]

Paul is claiming that *he* is the medium of God's revelation; through him the world is learning about the Son, the newly-disclosed means of salvation for Jew and gentile alike. (Of course, there were others besides Paul who were preaching that revelation, but Paul places the focus on himself whenever he can, and he could well have been the premier apostle of his time.)

The centerpiece of God's revelation is Christ himself: the existence of the Son and the role he has played in God's plan for salvation. Such things are not based on historical record, or on the interpretation of a recent man. They are part of a divine mystery, a secret hidden with God which has now been revealed.

In defending Christian doctrine in the opening chapters of 1 Corinthians, Paul says: "We speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God designed for our glory before time began." When and how was that secret revealed? In Romans 16:25-6, Paul (or a later editor) proclaims his gospel

...about Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept in silence for long ages but now revealed, and made known through prophetic writings at the command of God... [my trans.]

God's secret has lain unknown throughout the long ages of history. It has been disclosed for the first time through the gospel of those like Paul, the source of which lies in scripture. In Colossians 2:2, pseudo-Paul speaks of the Laodiceans learning "the mystery of God, namely Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

Earlier in that letter (1:26), the writer declares that the mystery "kept hidden for ages and generations is now disclosed...(that) Christ is in you, the hope of your glory." A passage in Ephesians (3:5) contains all the elements of the new drama: "The mystery about Christ [with its equal benefit to the gentiles] which in former generations was not made known to the human race, is now revealed to dedicated apostles and prophets through the Spirit."

No room has been made in any of these passages for Jesus' life and work in the process of revelation. All is from the Spirit sent to "dedicated" apostles like Paul, a secret revealed after being hidden throughout history with God in heaven. In the latter two passages above from Colossians and Ephesians, the "secret" of Christ includes a narrower element (Christ in you, the gentiles as sharers of the promise), and there are those who have argued that Jesus himself may not have been regarded as having taught these particular points. But is writer after writer going to speak of anything to do with the revelation of God's secrets surrounding Christ and never express the thought that the Son on earth was the first and primary revealer of such things? An indwelling Christ and a Law-free salvation for the gentiles are certainly Pauline focuses, probably to an extent seen in no other apostle of his day, but they are a development out of the fundamental secret of Christ the Son which he and others have extracted from scripture. They are subordinate parts of the overall message which Paul is carrying.

Look at Titus 1:3, speaking as Paul:

Yes, it is eternal life that God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago, and now in his own good time he has openly declared himself in the proclamation which was entrusted to me by ordinance of God our Savior. [NEB]

There is not a crack in this facade where Jesus could gain a foothold. In the past lie God's promises of eternal life, and the first action on those promises is the present revelation by God to apostles like Paul who have gone out to deliver the message. Jesus' own proclamation of eternal life, or whatever he may have proclaimed, has evaporated into the wind. Here is a prime example of the very exclusion of a human, historical Jesus.

The Language of Revelation

Christ has been revealed in the present time. The verbs used to describe this event express the language of disclosure, of revelation. No one says that Christ "came to earth" or "lived a life." Translators will sometimes convey the sense of incarnation by reading into these words the Gospel idea of Jesus' life on earth, but such meanings are unnecessary.

The NEB gives an acceptable translation of 1 Peter 1:20:

He (Christ) was predestined before the foundation of the world, and in this last period of time he was made manifest [or, was revealed] for your sake.

To manifest or reveal is the predominant meaning of the Greek verb "*phaneroo*." It means "to bring to light, display, make known," to make evident to the senses or to mental perception things previously hidden or unknown. In a religious context it refers to a god (or God) giving evidence of his presence, or providing knowledge about himself (see 2 Corinthians 2:14) as in a religious experience. Occasionally it will refer to a dramatic appearance, as in a post-resurrection manifestation of Jesus (in the interpolated ending to the Gospel of Mark, 16:12) or his coming at the End-time (Col. 3:4, 1 Pet. 5:4). It would be difficult to make this verb encompass the idea of incarnation and living a life.

The image in passages like that of 1 Peter is one of God revealing Christ to the world in these last times. This fits everything which Paul says on the subject as well, though Paul prefers *apokalupto* (to uncover, reveal, as in "apocalyptic"). This verb, too, can hardly apply to an incarnation.

In Romans 3:21, Paul speaks of God's justice as being "brought to light," using *phaneroo*. He goes on to say that God has "displayed" or "set forth" Christ and his atoning act (3:25), using the verb *protithemi*. Finally, the Pastoral epistles use the word *epiphaneia*, "appearance," which in Hellenistic literature refers to the manifestation of a god's presence, with no sense of incarnation.

That a whole range of Christian writers would consistently use this sort of language to speak of Christ's incarnation in the present time, with never a more explicit reference to a life on earth, is curious to say the least. The two passages in the epistles which seem to constitute a direct reference to human characteristics of Christ (Romans 1:3 and Galatians 4:4) will be dealt with in detail later.

But Paul, inspired by God's revelation, has discovered more than the existence of the Son. He and the circles he moves in have learned, as part of God's newly-disclosed secret, that this Son had undergone a sacrifice—in the higher spiritual realm—and that certain benefits are now available to the believer. God, through Jesus' sacrificial act, performed at an unspecified time and place, has stored up the means of redemption in a heavenly bank account, as it were, and that account is now open for withdrawals. Such saving funds are available through faith and the rite of baptism. The nature of Jesus' sacrifice and the rising from death which followed it will be examined in Part Four, together with the mythical realm where it all took place.

But now we return to the picture of the apostolic movement which was preaching these things.

Apostles and Ministries

If Jesus had conducted a ministry within living memory, within Paul's own lifetime, remembrance of that ministry would surely have loomed large in Christian awareness. In the rough and tumble world of religious proselytizing, the appeal to Jesus' own words and actions, the urge to claim a direct link back to Jesus himself in order to confer authority and reliability on each apostle's preaching of the Christ, would have been an inevitable and indispensable mark of the early missionary movement. There would also have been an appeal to the apostles who had been chosen by Jesus and heard the words he spoke. If too much time had passed, that appeal would have been to those whom such followers had themselves appointed and imparted the proper doctrine.

As Christianity approached the second century of its existence, these ideas start to appear in the wider written record and are known as "apostolic tradition."

Fishers of Men

Yet the surprising fact is that such a picture is completely missing in all the non-Gospel evidence of almost the first hundred years. That evidence contains a void on the very concept of followers of an earthly Jesus.

If an earthly Jesus had chosen personal followers—referred to in the Gospels and Acts as "disciples"—one would not know it from Paul or other early writers. The word "disciple(s)" never appears in the New Testament documents outside the Gospels and Acts, even though many of these supposed followers would still have been alive at the time of Paul, brimming with memories and stories of their experiences with the Master himself. On such things the epistles are silent.

By contrast, the word "apostle" means "messenger," and the epistles are saturated with the idea. It refers to those who are "sent out" to deliver a preaching message, usually by God. This was an age when many believed they were being called by some deity or other to go out into the world and offer a message of salvation. In the Gospels, the term refers to those chosen and sent out by Jesus, and it became narrowly applied to the group known as the Twelve, although these could also be referred to, in their attendance on Jesus during his ministry, as the "twelve disciples." Strictly speaking, when these "disciples" went out to preach, both during and after Jesus' life, they became "apostles." (See Matthew 10:1-2.)

Yet Paul gives us no hint that this selection of disciples and apostles by Jesus was a factor in the world in which he moved. In 1 Corinthians 12:28, he says that in the church, *God* had appointed apostles, prophets and teachers. In Galatians 1 and 2, he calls the Jerusalem group "those who were apostles before me," with no suggestion that there was any difference in the quality or nature of their

respective apostleships. In 2:8 he declares that God has made Peter an apostle to the Jews just as he made Paul an apostle to the gentiles.¹⁶ (Every apostle regarded himself as "called," and any who had been followers of Jesus could not fail to have regarded themselves as being called by him.)

But the most important dispute Paul has to deal with is the threat to his very legitimacy. As Galatians and the Corinthian letters show, Paul and his gospel are being challenged by others. His competence, his authority, his reliability are being denigrated by rivals. And what is Paul's standard for legitimacy? In 1 Corinthians 9:1 he asks plaintively, "Am I not an apostle? Did I not see Jesus our Lord?" Paul's claim that he too has "seen the Lord" implies that his type of seeing—which no one would dispute was entirely visionary—is the same as that of the apostles to whom he is comparing himself. Otherwise, his appeal to his own vision of the Lord as placing himself legitimately within their ranks would be baseless. But those other apostles include Peter and the Jerusalem group. Thus the conclusion must be that these men too knew the Lord *only* by this kind of "seeing," namely a visionary one.

In a highly emotional defense of his apostleship, Paul compares himself to unnamed rivals who are competing for the Corinthians' affections:

Someone is convinced, is he, that he belongs to Christ? Let him think again, and reflect that we belong to Christ as much as he does. [2 Cor. 10:7, NEB]

The issue of a connection to an earthly Jesus is nowhere in sight. Nor does it surface in arguments like the following:

In no respect did I fall short of these superlative apostles, even if I am a nobody. The marks of the true apostle were there, in the work I did among you, which called for such constant fortitude, and was attended by signs, marvels and miracles. [2 Cor. 12:11-12, NEB]

"Are they servants of Christ?" Paul asks in 11:23. So is he, he declares, and goes on to list the sufferings and setbacks he has endured in the service of the gospel. Paul appeals only to the strength and reliability of his own revelations. He has been in direct contact with heaven. He is an apostle who owes his gospel directly to God, he says,¹⁷ not to some other men who taught him the results of their own revelations (Galatians 1:11-12).

The picture we get from Paul is of a sprawling, uncoordinated movement of wandering apostles going about preaching a divine Son. Rivals accuse one another of not carrying the proper doctrine, of not being qualified, but no one appeals to Jesus as an authority, no one traces anything, let alone legitimacy, through channels leading back to him. This is a level playing field.

Where has that "proper doctrine" come from? In 2 Corinthians 11:4, Paul defends himself against those apostles who have made disturbing inroads into his congregation in Corinth:

If someone comes who proclaims another Jesus, not the Jesus whom we proclaimed, or if you then receive a spirit different from the Spirit already given to you, or a gospel different from the gospel you have already accepted, you manage to put up with that. [NEB]

The teaching of these rivals, as well as his own, is not derived from a human Jesus. It is the product of perceived revelation. It comes through the "Spirit" which everyone claims to have received from God. The spirit claimed by his rivals Paul declares to be different and inferior to his own, so much so that he condemns them as "sham apostles, crooked in all their practices, masquerading as apostles of Christ... (who) will meet the end their deeds deserve" (11:13-15).

Such language should tell us that these apostles are not the group around Peter and James, for Paul could never have spoken of them with such vilification and absolute rejection. Elsewhere, his dealings with Peter and the others are usually courteous, if at times uneasy (he expresses exasperation with them in Galatians 2:6), and throughout his career he is engaged in making a financial collection from his gentile communities on behalf of the church in Jerusalem.

Of his rivals in Corinth, Paul is forced to allow, grudgingly, that they are, by some objective standard which the Corinthians accept, "servants of Christ." All this supports a picture of early Christianity as a varied, amorphous movement of groups and individuals, inspired by revelation, owing no allegiance to a central authority, having no unified point of origin or set of doctrines. Each apostle proclaimed his own version of the spiritual Christ to anyone who would listen.¹⁸

"The Twelve"

Paul applies the term "apostle" to a wide range of Christian missionaries, from himself and Barnabas and assorted other colleagues, to rivals he viciously condemns. As noted above, it is only with the Gospels, written a half century and more after Jesus' supposed death, that we find the term narrowed to a select group of men personally chosen by Jesus. Some scholars, such as Rudolf Bultmann (*Theology of the New Testament* I, p.37), have rejected outright the historicity of the Twelve as an inner circle accompanying Jesus in his ministry.

Does Paul give any evidence of the "twelve" apostles as the Gospels present them? The term appears once, when he lists those who had visions of the Christ:

...he was seen by Cephas, and afterward by the Twelve...then he was seen by James and afterward by all the apostles. [1 Cor. 15:5-7]

From this, one might be led to conclude that Peter (Cephas) is not a member of the Twelve and that the group known as "the apostles" is larger than the Twelve and may not include them. What this body actually constituted in Paul's time is uncertain. Paul's account in Galatians (1:18-19) of his first visit to Jerusalem following his conversion makes no mention of them as a group, and the only names of apostles from Jerusalem which he records anywhere in his letters are Peter, John and James, the latter being the head of the Jerusalem church, not the James of the twelve (son of Zebedee) in Gospel tradition.¹⁹

Apostolic Tradition

When it finally developed in the 2nd century, the concept of apostolic tradition served important needs for the growing Christian movement. After the Gospel Jesus of Nazareth came to be regarded as an historical figure, Christian congregations felt the need for a pipeline back to him, a guarantee that the

doctrines they held were correct and had been instituted by Jesus himself. The point of contact at the other end of that pipeline became a select group of followers Jesus had called to be witnesses to his teachings, death and resurrection. Some were based on legendary apostles of the early period. A reliable conduit to those original witnesses had to be created, a supposedly unbroken chain of teaching and authority extending from the earliest apostles to the later church. Every Christian group, orthodox or heretical, eventually had its own chain going back to one of those original apostles, regarded as the founder of its own community and serving as a guarantor of its doctrinal correctness.

That this apostolic tradition was missing earlier can be seen from several documents. Chapter 11 of the *Didache* contains instructions to the community on how to judge the legitimacy of wandering apostles, both in their teaching and their charismatic activities. Yet no part of this judgment is based upon the principle of apostolic tradition; there is no question of tracing authority or correctness back to Jesus or even to earlier apostles. In Hebrews 13:7, the author tells his readers: "Remember your leaders, those who first spoke God's message to you." Not only are those leaders not located in a line going back to earlier apostles, the message is not from Jesus, but from God through revelation.

But the truly arresting silence is found in 1 John 4:1.

Do not trust any and every spirit [i.e., prophetic utterance], my friends; test the spirits, to see whether they are from God, for among those who have gone out into the world there are many prophets falsely inspired. [NEB]

What is the test which determines whether a Christian apostle is speaking truth? This epistle was written probably in the last decade of the 1st century. One would think that by this time such Christians would possess a body of material regarded as proceeding from Jesus himself, transmitted to them over the decades through a channel of authorized apostles and leaders. But such an idea is nowhere to be found in the Johannine epistles. There is not even the barest concept of a teaching passed on between generations, arising out of an apostolic past. Instead, as in Paul, true doctrine comes directly through revelation from God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, though some "spirits" are false and come from the devil. (Here they are labeled the "Antichrist," the first appearance of this term in Christian literature.)

For I Received What I Passed On To You

Does Paul never refer to apostolic tradition, to receiving information about Jesus from others? The Greek verb "paralambano" is used in three key passages in his letters. It means to "receive," to "take over" something passed on to oneself, usually relating to information or instruction. However, it was a verb also used in the Greek mysteries and in religious experiences generally, to refer to the reception of a revelation from a god.⁶ Paul himself applies it in both ways in a crucial passage in Galatians 1:11-12:

For I neither received it [i.e., the gospel Paul preaches] from (any) man, nor was I taught it, but [*understood*: I received it] through a revelation of Jesus Christ. [NASB]

In this one sentence, Paul uses *paralambano* in both meanings: receiving something from other men, and receiving something by revelation. In the second thought, the verb is understood, but it cannot be anything other than the "received" verb used previously; the "taught" verb would be in contradiction to the idea of revelation.

Here Paul makes a clear and passionate statement that the gospel he preaches about the Christ has come to him through personal revelation, not through human channels, not from other apostles. The details of that gospel are not spelled out here, but what is he referring to? The attempt is regularly made to assign to this passage a more limited "gospel" than the one he outlines in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4. But is this tenable?

In the opening chapter of Galatians, Paul rails against other apostles, or people within the Galatian community, who have come in behind Paul and led some members into following "a different gospel." Here he does not clarify what that difference was, or what aspect of his message was being challenged, but he lays a curse on anyone, even if he were an angel from heaven, who preaches a gospel at variance with his own. While this would seem to encompass serious dimensions of his teaching, if not its entirety, later in the letter he makes it clear what the central issue was in regard to this occasion:

I tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all...any man who receives circumcision is compelled to keep the whole Law....It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh, so they can avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ, who are trying to compel you to be circumcised. [5:2-3, 6:12]

In chapter 1, then, it is likely that Paul is incensed at those who are urging the necessity for circumcision on the males of the Galatians community, although such "Judaizers," mention of whom one encounters elsewhere in the epistles, were usually known to urge the adoption (or reinstatement) of other Jewish traditions as well. But after his initial outburst (1:6-9), Paul broadens the scope of his argument in an attempt to justify the value of his gospel in general and his own integrity in formulating it, giving his readers some of his own historical background, first as a persecutor of the faith and then as a convert and apostle. He is not currying favor with anyone, he says, but seeking only God's approval, serving Christ.

Thus, when he makes his declaration in 1:11-12 that the gospel the Galatians heard him preach was not "received" from any man, nor taught to him, but rather received through a revelation from (or of) Jesus Christ, he should no longer be regarded as speaking solely of the issue of circumcision. The "gospel you heard me preach" would have encompassed much more than his policy on gentiles being exempt from that aspect of the Law. He is defending the specific issue at hand by defending the integrity of his entire gospel, as one which came directly from heaven and not from other men. Paul would hardly be saying that the gospel the Galatians heard him preach *about freedom from circumcision* is something he received from heaven, while the rest of his gospel content had in fact been received from men. He would make no such sweeping statement if he

did not intend it to apply to the entirety of his preaching message, which included his theology of the death and resurrection of Christ and its derivation from scripture. Regardless of the specific debate going on in Galatia, Paul is now defending and playing up the source of his gospel as a whole. He is proud of his personal revelation from heaven and makes no bones about it."¹

In fact, no one was likely to be challenging Paul on the issue of freedom from circumcision and the Law and accusing him of getting his preaching on *that* score from anyone else, especially Peter and James. Thus there would have been no need for Paul to object so adamantly to a non-existent accusation. His declaration clearly applies to his entire gospel.

As such, Galatians 1:11-12 must determine how we read the statement he makes in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4:

For I delivered to you...what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried; and that he was raised on the third day, according to the scriptures. [NASB]

Here we have a statement of Paul's fundamental gospel about the Christ. In Galatians 1:11-12 he has declared that he received his gospel from no man, but through revelation. Unless we assume that he is blatantly contradicting himself, logic dictates that Paul's "received" in 1 Corinthians 15:3 must mean "received through revelation." And where has Paul derived his information about Christ's death and resurrection? He tells us twice in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4: "according to the scriptures" (*kata tas graphas*). While scholars have always taken this to mean "in fulfillment of the scriptures"—despite the fact that such an idea Paul nowhere discusses—the Greek preposition *kata* can also render the meaning behind the phrase "as we learn from the scriptures."²²

It may be objected that Paul would be making a false claim here in implying (as he seems to do in Galatians 1:16 as well) that it was he who 'discovered' Christ and his redeeming acts in scripture, since others had been apostles before him and were presumably (as he says in 15:11) teaching the same thing. But we cannot lay too great a burden on Paul's faithfulness to meticulous accuracy. He is pleading his case in the face of challenges. While he was part of a broad movement which imagined God had revealed the Son and his role in salvation, he is naturally at pains to place the focus on himself as the prime, superior expression of that movement and its interpretation from scripture—basically the one who has gotten it right. And to some extent, he may have been justified, having brought a sophistication to that revelation from God which no one else had achieved. The survival of his name and work where many other apostles of the Christ went into oblivion would indicate that.

If Christ dying for sin and rising from death is a revealed gospel, extracted from scripture, it would seem that both the death and resurrection are articles of faith, not of historical witness. Paul is not likely to declare that he knows of these things through revelation if they were common knowledge about historical events passed on through oral tradition.

It is sometimes claimed that "he was buried" must be a piece of historical data, since he would not likely have found indication of such a thing in scripture,

nor can we identify any candidate for it as we can for the other two (Isaiah 53 and Hosea 6:2); indeed, he leaves off declaring such a source for it. But Paul could well have included it for his own purposes. Aside from 'burial' being a reasonable link to postulate between death and rising three days later (even in myth, as in that of Osiris), it would nicely fit with Paul's picture of the mystical effects of baptism, as he lays them out in Romans 6:

By baptism we were buried with him, and lay dead, in order that, as Christ was raised from the dead in the splendor of the Father, so also we might set our feet upon the new path of life.

As we shall see, the salvation process worked through parallel experiences between savior god and initiate. Paul could conceive of a burial of Christ to complement a burial of the believer (both being a symbolic mystical idea rather than a literal one), each before ascending to a new life.

Thus we have every reason to interpret the "received" of 1 Corinthians 15:3 as a reception through revelation and not passed-on tradition. Eddy and Boyd (*op.cit.*, p.215) maintain that "Paul on occasion acknowledges that he was passing on teachings he had received from others," but the passages they appeal to for support fail to do that; in fact, the usual translations are essentially begging the question. We can look at a few of them:

1 Corinthians 11:2 - I praise you for remembering me in everything, and for holding to the teachings [*in a footnote: or, traditions (paradoseis)*], just as I passed them on [*paraddka*] to you. [NIV]

The word "*paradosis*" means something that is handed over, delivered. But while it was commonly used as a technical term for a teaching or tradition that has been repeatedly handed down through intermediaries (as in rabbinic lore), it does not have to entail this (see note 20). It can be a teaching that is 'handed over' *by its source*; there need have been no prior stage of transmission. In the above verse, Paul may simply be saying that the Corinthians have adhered to the teachings which *he* has previously delivered to them, something coming from himself, with his source in some cases being directly from the Lord. The latter meaning is clear in another passage appealed to by Eddy and Boyd:

1 Thessalonians 4:2 - For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus [lit., through the Lord Jesus].

This is not passed on tradition, it is Paul's own instruction received from the Lord and transmitted to the Thessalonians by the Lord's authority. No previous source is involved here (unless one reads it into the passage). In 2 Thessalonians 3:6, the author writing in Paul's name directs his readers to "live according to the teaching [*paradosin*] you received from us," meaning Paul. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (informally, "Bauer's lexicon" which is the way it will hereafter be referred to in this book) points out that this "*paradosis*" refers to "Paul's teaching"; certainly, the writer gives no hint that it belonged to anyone else.

Eddy and Boyd appeal, of course, to 1 Corinthians 15:3 as well. But it is a simple matter to prove one's case by reading it into the text, while ignoring

alternative and more direct understandings which would not. They have also read into simple phrases like "Do you not know that..." the implication that the audience "knows" this from the passed-on traditions of the teachings of Jesus, rather than from Paul's previously delivered teachings of his own.²³ This, in fact, is the simplest understanding of 1 Corinthians 15:3:

For I delivered [*pareddka*, from *paradidomi*, to give, hand over] to you as of prime importance what I also received [*parelabon*, from *paralambano*, here meaning 'received' by revelation]...

Paul is repeating (see verse 1: "I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you") the teaching he derived from scripture that he had previously given them.

Receiving a Myth through Revelation

This enables us to interpret the third important passage in which Paul uses the same verb, *paralambano*. There is no denying that this is crucial to the argument of the Jesus myth theory, and is that third "apparent exception" to the Missing Equation spoken of in chapter 1, the passage which seems to be the sole Gospel-like scene in all of Paul's letters.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 begins:

For I received (the verb *paralambano*) from the Lord that which I passed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was delivered up, took bread, and when he had given thanks, broke it and said: "This is my body, which is for you..." [my trans.]

Since *paralambano* has elsewhere meant 'received through revelation' and since Paul speaks generally about his doctrine as coming through this channel—and since the words plainly say so—this passage should mean that Paul has received this information through a direct revelation from the Lord Jesus himself.

But here too, if he means that this information came to him through revelation, he is unlikely to be referring to an historical event. In the Corinthians' eyes, it would be ludicrous for Paul to say he got it from the Lord if the Supper and the words spoken there were an historical incident well-known to Christians. Most scholars, however, still insist on viewing this as passed-on tradition, presumably from apostles like Peter who were at the supposed event.²⁴

Eddy and Boyd (*op.cit.*, p.219-20) are particularly exercised to discredit the 'direct revelation' interpretation. They state that nowhere else does Paul claim to acquire information about *past historical events* through revelation. First of all, our analysis has shown the strong likelihood that this is precisely what he has done in regard to the 'events' of his gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; he has derived them from scripture. Moreover, the epistle of Barnabas does exactly this, as we shall see in chapter 30. But while Barnabas speaks of what was revealed by scripture as being "past *historical events*," to assume the same for Paul when he does not state this is begging the question; Paul may be receiving knowledge from the Lord about a *supernatural* event. Eddy and Boyd try to make the words imply that it is the Corinthians who are "receiving from the Lord" the teaching Paul is giving them about the "Last Supper" (Paul calls it the "Lord's Supper"

which, as we shall see, better fits the mythical category). They claim that Paul's reported words represent a "wholly fixed verbal form" and suggest comparing them with Luke's. But they are surely aware that the words in Luke do not match those in Paul. The common words are:

1 Corinthians 11:23 — (Spoken over the bread) "This is my body, [for you; do this in remembrance of me]." (He then goes on to report words spoken over the cup.)

Luke 22:19 - "This is my body."

We cannot quote any further words in Luke, because what follows—about "for you," remembrance, and the cup—is not found in some manuscripts, and there is a general consensus among mainstream scholars that the additional parts are secondary, added by a later editor to bring Luke's text into line with fuller accounts, cribbing from other Gospels and perhaps even from Paul. (Shorter readings are regarded as more original than expanded ones; the NEB consigns all of the extra material [v,19b-20] to a footnote.) Since Luke in the previous verse 18 has already dealt with the cup—though giving it no sacrificial import—the repetition of the cup in verse 20 betrays itself as a later addition. As for the single phrase in common between Paul and Luke, it is so brief and basic that no dependence can be confidently assumed. Mark and Matthew contain the basic phrase "This is my body" but lack "for you"; and even in that first phrase, Paul's word order (at least as come down to us) is slightly different. The Synoptics have the phrase in common because Matthew and Luke have taken it from Mark. John ignores the establishment of the Eucharist altogether, as does Acts.

Thus, there is no compelling reason to regard Paul's words as representing an established formula he has derived from tradition. We will see in the next Part that there is in fact no witness to the existence of a sacramental Eucharist established by Jesus in any 1st century Christian writing outside the Gospels—in fact, it is perplexingly missing in a few places—making it quite possible that the entire scene is the invention of Paul, inspired by "the Lord."

If Paul knows of this "Supper" not through human reportage but by personal revelation, this removes the whole scene from any necessity of having taken place in history. It can be assigned to the realm of myth, where similar scenes in the mystery cults were located. The Lord's Supper passage in 1 Corinthians will be revisited when we look at some of its other features during examination of ancient myth and the sacred meals of the mysteries.

Paul's Ministry of Glory

When Paul speaks of his work as an apostle, there is no sense that he regards himself as building on the work of Jesus. It is Paul who has received from God "the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18-19); it is he whom God has qualified "to dispense his new covenant" (2 Cor. 3:5). Paul's disregard for Jesus' own ministry of reconciliation and dispensation of the new covenant is quite astonishing. He goes on to offer a parallel to Moses' splendor in the giving of the old covenant (2 Cor. 3:7-11). Typically, it is not Jesus' recent ministry he points to, but the splendor of his own ministry through the Spirit.

The role of Jesus on earth seems to have been forgotten. "It is all God's doing," Paul tells the Corinthians, "he has set his seal upon us" (2 Cor. 1:21-22). It is "by God's own act" (Gal. 4:7) that the gentiles are heirs to the promise. No act of Jesus is in evidence. "All that may be known of God by men...God himself has disclosed to them" (Romans 1:19). But what had Jesus been doing on earth if not disclosing God? Had not God's attributes been visible in him?

Nor does Jesus play a role in the response of the believer. It is God who calls the Corinthians "to share in the life of his Son" (1 Cor. 1:9), God who "appeals" to them through Paul (2 Cor. 5:20). The Christians of Thessalonica have been "called to holiness" not by Jesus but by God (1 Thess. 4:8), and if they flout Paul's rules, they flout God, "who bestows on (them) his Holy Spirit."

The void Paul reveals on the ministry of Jesus is nowhere so evident as in Romans 10. Here he is discussing the 'guilt' of the Jews for not responding to the message about the Christ, even though they had every opportunity to do so. But what did that opportunity encompass?

How can (the Jews) call on the one [i.e., Christ] they have not believed in?
 And how can they believe in the one of whom [*hou*] they have not heard?
 And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? [10:14, NIV]

Paul speaks of the Jews' opportunity to hear *about* Jesus from apostles like himself. But what of the opportunity they had enjoyed to hear the message from the person of Jesus himself? For at least some of them had been witnesses to his earthly ministry. How could Paul fail to highlight his countrymen's spurning of the Son of God in the flesh?

C. K. Barrett (*Epistle to the Romans*, p. 189) attempts to work Jesus into the picture. In the second line of the quote above, "*hou ouk ekousan*" is almost universally translated "o/ whom they have not heard," including by Bauer's lexicon. Barrett insists that it should be understood as 'to hear someone directly,' in this case to hear Christ "either in his own person, or in the person of his preachers." Apart from wanting it both ways, Barrett fails to take into account that forcing Jesus into the mix destroys Paul's finely created chain, one which focuses entirely on the response to the apostolic message. Barrett is not only showing us what we should rightly expect to find there, he is letting what he cannot believe is missing override what is clearly not there in Paul's words.

Subsequently, Paul contrasts the Jews with the gentiles who have accepted the gospel message. But he passes up the obvious point of contrast: that whereas the Jews had rejected the message even though delivered by Jesus himself, the gentiles had accepted it second-hand, from such as Paul.

Paul goes on in Romans 11 to reveal another remarkable silence. As part of his criticism of the Jews' failure to respond to apostles like himself, he refers to Elijah's words in 1 Kings: "Lord, they have killed thy prophets." This idea that the Jewish establishment had a long habit of killing prophets sent from God was popular among Jewish sectarian circles, although it was founded on little historical basis. But it is a telling silence that Paul does not add to this supposed record the ultimate atrocity of the killing of the Son of God himself.

Apocalyptic Expectations

Paul and other Christian apostles are not only preaching salvation through the Son. They are forecasting an imminent and dramatic overthrow of the present world.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17, one of the "words of the Lord" examined in a previous chapter, Paul informs his readers:

For this we tell you as the Lord's word: we who are left alive until the Lord comes shall not forestall those who have died; because at the word of command, at the sound of the archangel's voice and God's trumpet-call, the Lord himself will descend from heaven; first the Christian dead will rise, then we who are left alive shall join them, caught up in clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Thus we shall always be with the Lord. [NEB]

A few verses later, Paul warns: "For you know very well that the day of the Lord comes like a thief in the night." This is very similar to Jesus' saying in Matthew 24:42 and Luke 12:39, where he warns of the unpredictable arrival of the Son of Man, yet Paul shows no sign he is aware of any such saying by Jesus. Several other epistle writers make predictions about the coming End, about turbulent times and the arrival of a heavenly judge, but none point to Jesus' own predictions about the Day of the Lord and his own arrival at the End-time as the Son of Man. No one mentions any element of the Gospel picture of Jesus (Mark 13 and parallels) as a prophet of an apocalyptic transformation of the world.

The Day of the Lord

The Day of the Lord: the determining mythic belief of Jewish society. It colored the entire post-Exilic period until the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish state in two cataclysmic revolts against Rome: 66-70 CE and 132-135 CE. Thereafter, the Jewish people were truly dispersed for almost two millennia.

Through centuries of foreign subjugation—abated for one century under the Maccabean kings—from the Babylonian conquest in the 6th century BCE which sent much of the population into exile, through successive overlords Persian, Macedonian and Roman, the Jews built a unique future myth for themselves.

This myth said that God would one day rescue the Jews from their distress and humiliation, establish a new covenant with his chosen people, and raise them to their destined rule over the nations of the earth. One line of thought said that God would accomplish all this through a Messiah (Anointed One), a conqueror and righteous ruler who would be descended from Israel's great king, David.

Prophets at the time of the Exile had begun the trend by promising a restoration at God's hand from the ravages of the Babylonians. Many eventually

returned from Babylon to set up a new state when Cyrus the Persian overthrew the Babylonian empire, but Israel remained under foreign yoke and hardly enjoyed a restoration on the scale that Ezekiel, Jeremiah and (Second) Isaiah had confidently promised. And so their prophecies, supplemented by those of other prophets, came to be seen as speaking of a time yet to come, and the tale grew with the telling. Disasters for their enemies, miracles and a resurrection for the pious, a remaking of the whole earth, such things became the popularly-held scenario of the eagerly awaited day when God or his Messiah would arrive to judge the world and establish his kingdom. God's kingdom became the beacon that lighted the future toward which so many turned their gaze.

But it was all contingent on one thing: the achievement of Israel's purity through a faithful observance of God's Law. This outlook was one of the driving forces in the study and refinement of the Mosaic laws, in a quest to discover just exactly what it was that God wanted of his people. The problem was that this achievement of national purity lay nowhere in sight, as the Hellenistic age progressed and Greek culture made substantial inroads into Jewish society, especially at the level of the ruling class. As time went on, therefore, many despaired and a new idea entered the picture. Only a righteous elect would be saved, while all the rest, Jew and gentile alike, were to be consigned to some cataclysmic judgment of fire. This expectation of a violent transformation of the world is generally called "apocalypticism."²⁵

To these nationalistic yearnings must be added broader social ones. The poor, the socially disadvantaged, the oppressed, also looked for some kind of upheaval in which justice would be dispensed and the lot of rich and poor reversed. War, disease, taxation and superstition took their toll on people's spirits until only the direct intervention of God was seen to promise a way out of the world's misery. It was an emotionally unsettled era. In Roman times, Zealot leaders and would-be Messiahs regularly arose to lead great numbers of the common people into excited demonstrations and riots. They were usually slaughtered by the Roman military authorities.

Such conditions and expectations led to the formation of special interest and sectarian groups within Jewish society, until eventually the 'mainstream' class surrounding the Temple cult was fringed by numerous sects going off at countless tangents of religious philosophy and apocalyptic hopes. They included reform movements, some of whom rejected the Temple cult; baptist sects advocating repentance, using ritual washings; esoteric groups based on their own interpretations of scripture, many imbued with ideas from Hellenistic salvation theology, philosophy and magic. Much of this sectarian activity went on outside Palestine, where Greek influences were especially strong.

Among a profusion of Jewish apocalyptic sects was the movement we now call Christianity. It was uniform in neither origin or beliefs, unless it be in its focus on a divine Christ. For something had happened to the human figure, the Anointed One of God, descendant of David, who would arise to establish God's kingdom on earth. In the minds of some he had been transformed into a divinity, part of God himself, and he would arrive from heaven at the climax of history.

The Coming of the Lord

At the end of 1 Corinthians, Paul makes an urgent plea in Aramaic: "*Marana tha*__Come, O Lord!" John the prophet, at the end of his sanguinary prophecy of the world's destruction and renewal, the Book of Revelation, makes a similar entreaty: "Come, Lord Jesus!" In between, epistle writers from Paul on make frequent reference to the arrival of the Son at the End-time. But is this a *second* coming? Consider the flavor of these passages:

Philippians 1:6 - The One [i.e., God] who started the good work in you will bring it to completion by the Day of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:20 - We are citizens of heaven, and from heaven we expect our deliverer to come, the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Thessalonians 1:7 - (God will send relief to us) when our Lord Jesus Christ is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in blazing fire.

1 Peter 1:7 - so that your faith may prove itself worthy when Jesus Christ is revealed.

If readers can free themselves from Gospel preconceptions, they should find that these and other references of the same nature convey the distinct impression that this will be the Lord Jesus' first and only coming to earth, that this longing to see Christ has in no way been previously fulfilled. We keep waiting for the sense of "return" or the simple use of a word like "again." We wait for these writers to clarify, to acknowledge, that Jesus had already been on earth, that he had earlier begun the work he would complete at the Parousia (his "appearance/presence" at the End-time); that men and women had formerly witnessed their deliverance in the event of Jesus' death and resurrection; that he had been "revealed" (one of Paul's favorite words in speaking of the Parousia) to the sight of all in his incarnated life as Jesus of Nazareth. But never an echo of such ideas do we hear in the background of these passages.²⁶

Despite the picture provided by the Gospels that it is Jesus who will arrive at the End-time to judge the world and establish God's rule, early Christian writers are far from unanimous that it is the Son who is destined to perform this task. James speaks of the Parousia of the Lord (5:7) where he clearly means God himself; and 1 John, though the meaning is sometimes debated, also envisions the arrival of God, not Jesus (2:28-3:2). The same is true of the Didache 16, "The Lord will come," which quotes Zechariah 14:5, referring to God.

The Son of Man

No picture of Jesus coming at the Parousia should be able to ignore his End-time identity as the Son of Man. The Son of Man saturates the Gospels. Yet this dramatic apocalyptic figure, with whom Jesus identifies himself in all his predictions, who announces himself before the High Priest, this favorite self-designation of Jesus even in regard to his activities on earth, is in fact studiously ignored by Paul and every other writer of the New Testament epistles.

The Son of Man was born in the fevered mind of the author of the Book of Daniel. This seminal work for the development of apocalyptic literature was written during the crisis surrounding the Maccabean revolt (c168 BCE), when

the Jews successfully resisted the desecration of the Temple by the current Greek overlord, Antiochus IV. The author purports to be Daniel, a wise Jew living at the time of the Babylonian Exile. (This makes his 'predictions' about the intervening four centuries quite accurate!) Daniel additionally undergoes visions of the far future—the time of the writer—in which the Jews are foretold as finally overthrowing all foreign oppressors and receiving dominion over the earth from God. The latter event is symbolized by the vision scene in 7:13-14 in which "one like a son of man" approaches the divine throne and is granted "sovereignty and glory and kingly power...so that all people and nations of every language should serve him." This is said to be a sovereignty "which shall never pass away."

Whether this "one like a son of man" was regarded by the author as an angel or a son-like divine figure, or simply as a metaphor, is something still under debate, but he is described by the angel interpreting the vision (7:27) as representing the "saints of the Most High," namely, the righteous elect of Israel. As such, he is their *paradigm*, their representative counterpart.

In the latter half of the 1st century CE, the Danielic Son of Man surfaces in a cluster of Jewish and Christian writings (4 Ezra, 1 Enoch, Revelation, Q and the Gospels), variously interpreted. He has now become an apocalyptic figure from Heaven who will be involved in the imminent End-time, usually as a judge—God's agent, Messiah-like, even divine. Only in the Gospels and (perhaps) the latest layer of the Q document is he identified with an historical Jesus.

That the Son of Man was not a figure in early Christian expectation—let alone identified with a human Jesus—is virtually certain from the complete silence about him in all the epistles. Paul in particular is preoccupied with the imminent End. It seems inconceivable that if the Gospel picture were correct, Paul would either be unaware of Jesus' declared role as the Son of Man, or choose to ignore it. Even were this a development following Jesus' death, allotting to him such a future apocalyptic role, we should expect that before too long it would surface in the thinking of at least some of the epistle writers. The fact is, no one outside the Gospels and Acts refers to Jesus as the Son of Man in the apocalyptic sense before Justin in the mid 2nd century (Apology 51).

The Change of the Ages

Given the Christian view of the imminent transformation of the world and the establishment of God's kingdom, an apostle like Paul should have looked back to the life and ministry of Jesus as a milestone, a crucial point in the ongoing pattern of salvation history which would culminate in the Day of the Lord.

The Jewish conception of history and time was fairly simple. The period stretching back through known history was the "old age," an age of sin and evil and darkness, when God had permitted Satan to rule, when the righteous were persecuted and divine justice was delayed. The "new age" would begin with the arrival of some heavenly figure or messianic agent of God who would direct the overthrow of Israel's enemies and the forces of evil generally. This would be preceded by a build-up period in which woes and natural disasters would be visited upon the earth, to test the faithful.

In some apocalyptic pictures, an archetypal evil figure, Satan himself or his lieutenant, would direct all this final mayhem, but he would ultimately be overthrown and the kingdom would dawn. Later, in Christian thinking, this figure would be known as the Antichrist. (He had a predecessor in Jewish thought known as the "man (or son) of lawlessness"; he surfaces in 2 Thessalonians and the Apocalypse of Elijah.) Still, the pattern of salvation history, stretching in a line from past through to future, fell into two sections: the old age and the new. Scholars refer to this pattern as "two-age dualism."

According to the orthodox picture of Christian origins, however, a radical new dimension has been added. The Messiah had come, but not the kingdom with him. Christ had died and been resurrected, but still the new age had not dawned. That was to be delayed until his return, this time in glory and as judge at the Parousia. Between the two comings of Christ, as brief a period as that might be, the gospel message had to be carried to as many as possible and the world had to be made ready.

If this was indeed the scenario faced by the first few generations of Christian preachers and believers, we would expect to find two things. First, a significant recasting of the two-age pattern; the coming of Jesus would have been seen as a pivotal point in the ongoing scheme of redemption history. Second, that very failure of expectation would have required explanation. For no one could have anticipated—and no one did—that the arrival of the Messiah would *not* be accompanied by the establishment of the kingdom. We would expect to find an apologetic industry arising within the Christian movement to explain this strange and disappointing turn of events.

But do we find either of these two features in the epistles?

We have seen several passages in the Pauline letters which speak of the long-hidden divine "mysteries" which God has revealed to "apostles and prophets." There was no sign of Jesus' ministry there, no indication of a distinctive stage between the primal event of God's promise and the present apostolic movement heralding the new age (as in Titus 1).

But the revealing passages are those in which Paul expresses his eschatological (End-time) expectations. The first to look at is Romans 8:22-3:

Up to now, we know, the whole created universe groans in all its parts as if in the pangs of childbirth. Not only so, but even we, to whom the Spirit is given as firstfruits of the harvest to come, are groaning inwardly while we wait for God to make us his sons and set our whole body free. [NEB]

Here Paul's orientation is squarely on the future. The whole universe is groaning, waiting. Where is the sense of past fulfillment in the life and career of Jesus? Were some of the world's pains not assuaged by his coming? "Up to now," says Paul, has the universe labored to give birth, leaving no room for the dramatic pivot point of Christ's own birth and acts of salvation. Moreover, when Paul does refer to present or immediately past events, what are they? Only the giving of the Spirit, the revelation by God which has enlisted men like Paul to preach Christ and his coming. We have here no deviation from the traditional two-age picture.

Go on to Romans 13:11-12:

Remember how critical the moment is...for salvation is nearer to us now than it was when we first believed. It is far on in the night; day is near.

Was there no dawn at the incarnation of the Son of God? Had Jesus' recent presence on earth failed to dispel any of night's darkness? Even salvation itself is something which lies in the future; its only point of reference in the past is not Christ's act of redemption itself, but the moment when Christians first believed.

This is not a post-messianic world, it is not post-Jesus. To the extent that Paul envisions any pivot point in the immediate past, it is the time of revelation, the giving of the Spirit, the arrival of faith when God disclosed Christ and people responded to the messengers of that revelation. Paul looks backward only to the unveiling of the mystery about the Son.

Upon us the fulfillment of the ages has come!

So Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 10:11, pointing to the Parousia which he believes is very near. But how can Paul avoid addressing the inevitable question: why had the actual coming of the Messiah not produced the turn of the ages? For this had been the expectation of centuries. Surely the dramatic resurrection of the slain Messiah from his grave should have been enough to provoke the long awaited transformation of the world.

Christ "foretold" in the prophets. The day of salvation revealed in the sacred scriptures. But was it the life of Christ that had been foretold? The Son's historical act of redemption, located in Paul's recent past? Not according to 2 Corinthians 6:2 (here literally):

God says: "At the acceptable time I gave heed to you; on the day of deliverance I came to your aid." Behold, now is the acceptable time, now the day of salvation.

Paul's quote is Isaiah 49:8. It is one thing for Paul to ignore Jesus' career and claim the ministry of the new covenant glory for himself. It is quite another for Paul to claim that the prophetic words of scripture foretold not Jesus' life as "the acceptable time," not Jesus' acts of sacrifice and resurrection as "the day of salvation," but Paul's own activities and his preaching of the Christian message. This, as we shall see, is something he will do throughout his letters, bypassing any fulfillment of God's promises, prophecies and plans in the person of a Jesus on earth in the past.

Luke at least could recognize the monumental inappropriateness of this (if he had even read Paul), for in 4:19 of his Gospel, he has Jesus in a Nazareth synagogue read a similar passage from Isaiah (61:1-2) and declare to the startled assembly that it is he himself to whom this sacred prophecy refers.

Part Two

A LIFE IN ECLIPSE

6

From Bethlehem to Jerusalem

If the voice of Jesus in the early Christian correspondence is silent on everything from ethical teachings to apocalyptic predictions, if his calling of apostles during an earthly ministry is nowhere in evidence in the early apostolic movement, what about the physical details of his birth, ministry and passion? Is the life portrayed in the Gospels that is supposed to have been lived in the time of two Herods and Pontius Pilate anywhere in evidence in the New Testament epistles?

Many of the elements in the Gospel story have been rejected by modern critical scholarship as unhistorical. But our purpose is to examine all of them, to show that the Gospels are unreliable as an historical record, or as providing any basis for supporting the historicity of Jesus. This survey will also demonstrate that Christian documents outside the Gospels, even at the end of the 1st century and beyond, show no evidence that *any* traditions about an earthly life and ministry of Jesus were in circulation. Even in regard to Jesus' death and resurrection, to which many of those documents refer, there is no earthly setting provided for such events.

We will look at the epistolary silence on the Gospel story in two chapters, the first from the Nativity to the Last Supper, the second the passion scene of trial and crucifixion.

A Mortal Son of Mary

Around the year 107 Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, was escorted by Roman soldiers to the capital of the empire where he was condemned to die a martyr's death in the brutal arena. On the way, so tradition has it (something that will be questioned in a later chapter), he wrote letters to various Christian churches in Asia Minor. Several of these letters speak out stridently on the subject of heresy. Those who held doctrines at variance with Ignatius' own were labeled "mad dogs" and "beasts in the form of men."

Just what was this heresy? To the Christian community at Tralles, Ignatius wrote:

Close your ears, then, if anyone preaches to you without speaking of Jesus Christ. Christ was of David's line. He was the son of Mary, who was really born, ate and drank, was really persecuted under Pontius Pilate, was really crucified....He was also truly raised from the dead. (Epistle to the Trallians 9: If)

From the sound of it, Ignatius is arguing for a belief in the actual historicity of these events: that Jesus had been the son of a woman named Mary, that he had suffered and died under Pontius Pilate, the infamous Roman governor of Judea at the time of Herod Antipas. This is the Jesus Christ whom those he rails against seem not to be preaching. Ignatius also condemns what appears to be an early expression of docetism, and we will look at the question of Ignatius' various opponents in chapter 21.

According to these letters, Ignatius toward the end of the first decade of the 2nd century believes in a Jesus born of Mary, baptized by John, executed by Pilate in the days of Herod. He does not seem to be familiar with a written Gospel, for he does not appeal to one to support his claims. Does anyone before him, outside the early Gospel writers, possess this biographical data about Jesus? To judge by all the surviving Christian correspondence, the answer is no. (The one reference in the epistles to Pilate, in 1 Timothy 6:13, if authentic, probably comes a little later than Ignatius: see Appendix 1.)

Non-Gospel Christian writings before Ignatius have nothing to say about Mary; her name is never mentioned. Nor does Joseph, Jesus' reputed father, ever appear. The author of 1 Peter fails to offer Mary as a model in 3:1-6 when he is advising women to be chaste, submissive in their behavior, and reverent like those "who fixed their hopes on (God)." Instead, he offers the biblical figure of Sarah. Even in Mark, when Jesus' family is presented in 6:1-6 (mother Mary and brothers James, Joseph, Judas and Simon), its members are simply enumerated and never mentioned again. Mary puts in no further appearance, though other Mary's are given cameos, either Mary Magdalene, or as mothers of other figures; brother "James" is given no special role and does not reappear. One or more Mary's are stated as mother(s) of a "James" and a "Joseph" (15:47 and 16:1), leading some to maintain that since these are the names of Jesus' brothers as listed in 6:3, these and *their* mother Mary refer to the same family members. But we have no proof of that, and it would certainly be an oddity to think that Mark decided to spread his "Mary" references around to touch on her as the mother not only of Jesus but of two of his brothers, one being totally obscure.

If we are to see Mark as written before Ignatius, his is the first piece of Christian writing in which a Mary as the mother of Jesus emerges. As it is, the impression created in 1:1-6 is that Mark has simply introduced a family lineup to make his point that, as Jesus says, "A prophet will always be held in honor except in his home town, and among his kinsmen and family." Mary may have been born simply to serve the purpose of illustrating a proverb.

As for the Nativity stories in Matthew and Luke (Mark says nothing about such an event), images of the birth of Jesus bombard us at every Christmas, but

nowhere in the 1st century are such images discernible. Shepherds, angels, magi, mangers or overbooked inns are never mentioned; nor is the city of Bethlehem nor the great census under Augustus. No star lights up the night sky at Jesus' birth in either Christian or pagan writings. No association with the cruel Herod and his slaughter of innocent children, an event unrecorded by historians of the time, is ever made.

And what of Revelation 12? Amid the great portents of the End-time drawn by the prophet John is the vision of the "woman robed with the sun," the woman who, threatened by a great dragon, gives birth to "a male child destined to rule all nations with an iron rod." Later Christians took this as a reference to Mary and the infant Jesus, but the writer of Revelation makes no attempt to integrate his vision (whose fulfillment lies in the future) into any traditions about Jesus' birth and parentage. Immediately after the birth, the child is "snatched up to God and his throne," and the mother flees into the wilderness. There is not so much as a nod to Jesus' entire life. And no connection is made between this male child and the sacrificed Lamb who is another of John's heavenly apocalyptic figures.

In fact, the scene has nothing to do with Mary and Jesus. It relates to Jewish apocalyptic mythology (borrowing motifs from Hellenistic myths of Leto and Apollo) about the miraculous birth of the Messiah, who simply waits in heaven for the End-time. John's silence indicates that he knows nothing about traditions familiar to us from the Gospels, nothing about Mary or a human birth of Jesus. If he had, they would inevitably have influenced his crafting of characters which his readers would have assumed bore an obvious relationship to them.

Was Jesus Circumcised?

One of the features of Luke's nativity story (2:21) is the circumcision of Jesus in the Temple eight days after his birth. This, of course, was the experience of every newly-born Jewish male, and would have attracted no controversy. But controversy over circumcision was a prominent feature of Paul's missionary work among the gentiles. The movement's Jewish core in Jerusalem was at first adamant that gentile converts to the Christ needed to be circumcised according to the traditional Mosaic Law, and various 'Judaizing' elements in the communities Paul established or visited out in the Diaspora maintained the same thing. Along with the issue of gentile contact with Jews over purity and dietary laws, circumcision was the cutting issue of the day. Paul spends many words arguing about the need to suspend such requirements for gentiles wishing to adopt faith in Christ.

And yet not a murmur concerning Jesus' own circumcision enters into that debate. No opponent of Paul (since he is silent on such a thing) uses the argument that since the Lord himself was circumcised, this should strengthen the requirement for the circumcision of converts. Paul himself feels no pressure to explain why circumcision is no longer required—even to be shunned—despite the fact that Jesus himself had undergone the procedure. He can be particularly blunt on the matter, as in Galatians 5:2-4:

Mark my words: I, Paul, tell you that if you receive circumcision Christ will do you no good at all. I declare again that any man being circumcised is obligated to keep the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by the law have been severed from Christ, you have fallen from grace.

If Christ himself had been circumcised, it is hardly feasible that Paul could have spoken in these terms. A feature which emulated Christ severs the convert from Christ? A man circumcised must keep the whole law, even the one who called the Apostle (as he sees it) to preach *against* the law? An issue which is utterly central to Paul's message and which threatens to tear the new movement apart ignores Jesus' own relation to it, as well as anything which Jesus himself might have preached on the matter. And no one else brings up the issue, not even his supposed former disciples. There are anomalies within contradictions here.

Brother of the Lord

Did Jesus have a brother? Mark gives him four, and in Galatians 1:19 we read the words: "James, the brother of the Lord" (*Iakobon ton adelphon tou kuriou*). It may well be this phrase which led later Christians to make Paul's James, head of the Jerusalem church until his martyrdom perhaps around 62 CE, a sibling of Jesus himself. But does Paul's reference to James mean this?

The term "brother" (*adelphos*) appears throughout Paul's letters, and was a common designation Christians gave to each other. In 1 Corinthians 1:1 Sosthenes is called *adelphos*, as is Timothy in Colossians 1:1. Neither one of them, nor the more than 500 "brothers" who received a vision of the spiritual Christ in Corinthians 15:6, are to be considered siblings of Jesus. "Brothers in the Lord" (*adelphon en kurio*) appears in Philippians 1:14 (the NEB translates it "our fellow-Christians"). This is a strong indicator of what the phrase applied to James must have meant. James seems to have been the head of a community in Jerusalem which bore witness to the spiritual Christ, a group apparently calling itself "brethren of/in the Lord"; the two versions were probably interchangeable. Note that such designations are always "of the Lord," never "of Jesus" (and in fact there is always the possibility that the "Lord" in such a phrase referred to God). We might also note that the term "*adelphos*" was common in Greek circles to refer to the initiates who belonged to the mystery cults.²⁷

In 1 Corinthians 9:5, "the brothers of the Lord" are traditionally assumed to mean male siblings of Jesus, and yet in the same breath, the reference to a "sister wife" (*adelphē gunaika*) whom Paul asks if he can bring about with him as do the "brothers (*adelphoi*) of the Lord" is acknowledged without question to refer to a female member of the sect. Indeed, all translations render it a "believing wife" or a "Christian wife." There should similarly be no question what "brother of the Lord" means. The more archaic rendering as "brethren of/in the Lord" conveys the right connotation: it refers to a community of like-minded believers, members of the sect and followers of its divine figure, not siblings of each other or anyone else. Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:5-6 refers to resolving disputes between "brothers," to "brother" going to law against "brother" in the 'brethren' sense

(some translations render the word "believers"). We even have cases of the word "brother" being directly linked with Jesus where the meaning is definitely not sibling. In Ephesians 6:21, Tychicus is "the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord," without being a blood relation. Hebrews 2:11-12 says:

Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. He says [quoting scripture]: "I will declare your name to my brothers..."

If Jesus is not ashamed to call those who believe in him his "brothers," we should not be ashamed to have Paul calling James and his circle "brothers" of the Lord in a similar non-sibling sense. It is surprising how frequently apologetic argument maintains that "brother" in Galatians 1:19 has the 'natural' meaning of sibling when the vast majority of cases use the word in a sense which has no such meaning.

Some of the argument revolves around the fact that the phrase "brother(s) of the Lord" does not seem to be applied to everyone in the sect, but rather to a group within it. While this may be due to a certain looseness of language (Peter, for example, is mentioned separately in 1 Corinthians 9:5, but this may be for emphasis and need not mean that he is not one of the 'brothers'), other explanations are available. My own would be that the Jerusalem sect known to Paul began a number of years earlier as a monastic group calling itself "brothers of the Lord" (possibly meaning God) and after those initial visions revealing the existence of the dying and rising Son as recounted in 1 Corinthians 15:5-7, this group expanded its 'mandate' to encompass apostolic work and attracted satellite members who, while being referred to as "brothers," were thought of as distinct from the original core group. (A separate reference to "the apostles" in 1 Corinthians 9:5 may suggest this.) Paul himself could have been regarded in this way, though he soon struck off in his own independent direction.

As to the specific phrase used of James in Galatians 1:19, much has been made of the wording that James was *the* brother of the Lord. Some have claimed that this renders the meaning of "brother" as a sibling, that no other single individual was called "*the* brother of the Lord." Mythicists have countered that the phrase's unique individuality may have been due to James' status as head of the sect. (I suggested this in the original *The Jesus Puzzle*.) However, it seems that everyone, myself included, overlooked an important consideration. In fact, there are three.

First of all, historicist apologists tend to place an astonishing reliance on this particular phrase, *lakohon ton adelphon tou kuriou*, as virtually 'proving' the existence of an historical Jesus. But the idea that any secure argument can be made in any direction based on such fine wording in a text is an ill-advised one. That article (*ton*), together with the phrase itself, is first witnessed to in a manuscript written at a time which is almost two centuries after the original. Given what we know about the evolution of texts, the alterations to manuscripts and so on, it is by no means sure how secure any wording, especially a slight one, in a New Testament text should be considered which is that far removed

from the autograph. How can a decision be made about key questions based on this inherent degree of uncertainty, an uncertainty justified by the general instability of the textual record visible in the manuscripts we do have? And yet arguments are formulated on such slender reeds all the time—and not excepting by mythicists.

Second, the Galatians phrase "the brother of the Lord" can hardly be said to stand out as singling out James from others in the sect. How would the Galatians understand it as meaning *the* head of the group? (I once asked if Paul had the word "*ton*" written in big caps.)

But the third and most important consideration involves this word "*ton*." Even if we were to assume that the present text reflects the original, the significance of the article's inclusion is virtually nil. Greek had no indefinite article. There was no way to specify "a brother of the Lord" (in the sense of "one of the brothers of the Lord") except by simply leaving out the definite article. But in the case of the Galatians phrase, the inclusion of the definite article does not mean that Paul is intending a stress or special status on "*the* brother." In a phrase like "James the brother of the Lord"—"*Iakobon ton adelphon tou kuriou*"—"James" and "brother" are in grammatical apposition. In such a structure, Greek linguistic practice generally inserts a definite article between them, even if all that was meant was "a brother of the Lord." Thus, the phrase need not have been singling out James as any special member of the group, even if he were the leader, but may simply designate him as belonging to that group known as "brethren of/in the Lord."

Now, it is true that, especially in Koine, the article could be left out, but its inclusion does not signify emphasis or unique status. We can see this principle illustrated in other epistolary passages. Romans 16:21: "Greetings from Timothy, my fellow worker" (*Timotheos ho sunergos mou*). The presence of the article (*ho*)—which is not used in the translation—does not mean that Timothy was Paul's only fellow-worker, or that he was the head of those workers. We know he was neither. In the same verse we find: "Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen" (*hoi suggeneis mou*). They are not the only kinsmen Paul has, nor are they special. He is simply identifying them as his kinsmen, yet he uses the definite article (*hoi*), where we do not need one in English. In 1 Corinthians 16:12 Paul refers to "Apollos (*the*) brother" (*Apollo tou adelphou*). Apollos is not being singled out as some kind of unique or special brother (and certainly not a sibling). Most translations render it "our brother Apollos."

As to why Paul felt he needed to identify James as one of the brethren of the Lord, one can only speculate. Earlier he has referred to Peter without identifying him in the same way. Perhaps Paul's readers were more familiar with Peter than with James. Perhaps there was another James attached to the Jerusalem circle who was not a member of the original sect known by the name.

All of this having been said, we cannot rule out an even simpler explanation, despite the lack of manuscript evidence to support it. The phrase may have begun as an interpolation or marginal gloss. (Its wording would ideally fit such a

thing.) Some later copyist, perhaps when a 2nd century Pauline corpus was being formed and after James' sibling relationship to the new historical Jesus had been established, may have wished to ensure that the reader would realize that Paul was referring to James the Just and not James the Gospel apostle. In such a case, a marginal gloss of "brother of the Lord" *would* have been meant in the sense of sibling, but governed by the Gospels, not by any knowledge of how Paul actually viewed the James of his day.

But there are further indications that early Christians knew of no sibling relationship between James and Jesus. The New Testament epistle of James opens this way: "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ..."

Few believe that James the Just actually wrote this letter, but if a later Christian is writing in his name, or even if only adding this ascription, common sense suggests that he would have identified James as the *brother* of the Lord Jesus if he had in fact been so, not simply as his servant. A similar void is left by the writer of the epistle of Jude. (Few likewise ascribe this letter to the actual Jude, whoever he was.) It opens: "Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ, and a brother of James..."

Now if James had been Jesus' sibling, and Jude is James' brother, this would make Jude the brother of Jesus, and someone of that name appears as such in Mark 6. So now we have two Christian letters ascribed to supposed blood brothers of Jesus, yet neither one of them makes such an identification. Attempted explanations for this silence are unconvincing.²⁹ They ignore the overriding fact that in the highly contentious atmosphere reflected in most Christian correspondence, the advantage of drawing on a kinship to Jesus to make the letter's position and the writer's authority more forceful would hardly have been passed up.

Jesus' Personal Life

It is a curious fact that not a single epistle writer records any data concerning Jesus' personal life, his appearance, his habits, his preferences. This, despite the fact that most of the New Testament epistles were written within the lifetimes of many who would have known or witnessed Jesus personally, within communities which should have been exposed to oral traditions about Jesus the man. We know not the slightest feature about him, his living accommodations, how he dressed, his tastes in anything from food to recreation. The early writers give us no indication of his height, weight, skin color, hairstyle, the quality of his voice, whether he was handsome or ugly. (Certain descriptions were to come in the late 2nd century and beyond, entirely based on scriptural passages. See Appendix 14.)

While such things are not the main concern of the epistles, it is difficult to accept that in an early Christian environment based on a charismatic man whose life had been observed by many, both followers and onlookers, no memory about anything personal concerning Jesus of Nazareth would ever surface in all the early writings. Even in the Gospels such things are scarcely to be found. There, Jesus of Nazareth as an individual and personality cannot be distinguished. Such

a figure is subsumed in the kingdom preacher as stereotype, in the larger-than-life yet two-dimensional prophet and sage who speaks a sectarian message that is part radical part commonplace such as any counterculture group might proclaim, whose personal anecdotes in miracle-working and controversy with the Jewish authorities are artificially constructed out of scripture.

Virtually nothing about Jesus in the Gospels, John especially, has the ring of reality, of a distinctive flesh and blood person. He is simply a mouthpiece, a formula figure to embody the sect's message. The genre of the Gospels is traditionally called biography. Rather, they are in the nature of morality plays, with a main character who appears no more real than Pilgrim in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. John Bunyan was not writing history or biography, and neither was Mark. As will be seen later in this book, the characters in both, including many of the secondary ones, bear the marks of allegory.

In regard to Jesus' life, a very telling silence in the epistles was recently noted. Was Jesus celibate? It was the practice for rabbis, even itinerant apostles, to be married. This extended into the Christian movement, as we can see from 1 Corinthians 9:5 where Paul points out that "the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas" have the right to "take along a believing wife" in their missionary travels. Jesus, if celibate, would have been a notable exception. And yet, earlier in the epistle, at 7:8-9, Paul is arguing for celibacy. He says:

Now, to the unmarried men and to the widows I say: it is good for them to remain so, as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

It should at once be obvious that if Jesus had been unmarried and celibate, he would have presented a prime example to support Paul's recommendation. Jesus would even have been one who went 'against the grain,' since married apostles were the norm.

On the other hand, in view of Paul's silence, might this indicate that Jesus was married? (That Paul would have been familiar at least with Jesus' marital status is hardly to be doubted.) But in 1 Corinthians 9:5, Paul did not appeal to the example of Jesus as one who had been accompanied by a wife, even though he is arguing for his own right to have one in principle. What better support could he have appealed to than the example of the Lord himself? As well, a surviving wife of Jesus would have been a figure on the early Christian scene, and no such figure emerges in any of the early record. (One might suggest that Mary Magdalene was such a figure and wife, but no one in the non-Gospel record for over a hundred years shows any knowledge of her.)

Most importantly, if Jesus had in fact been married, Paul would have had to deal with such a contrary example to his recommendation. Could he urge his readers to stay celibate when even the Lord himself had not done so? Moreover, he has said bluntly that those who cannot practice self-control over their sexual desires ought to marry. Would this not be taken to imply that Jesus could not exercise self-control? Either way, the loaded question of Jesus' marital status could not have been ignored.

The context of Paul's silence on this issue in 1 Corinthians contains the only apparent reference to teachings by Jesus to be found in the entire body of New Testament epistles: 7:10 on the command "from the Lord" prohibiting divorce; and 9:14 in which he declares that the Lord has commanded that preachers of the Gospel should earn their living by such activity. As we saw earlier, a common scholarly view sees these as directives which Paul believes he has received from Christ in heaven, through personal revelation. Attention was called to verse 25 as indicating such a personal channel, but this verse is also telling in regard to the question of Jesus' celibacy. Paul says,

As for (male) virgins, I do not have a command from the Lord, but I give my own judgment...

That he is speaking here of male celibates is clear from what follows in verses 26-27 in which he says that it is good for an unmarried man to remain so and not to seek a woman. Only then does he go on to deal with female virgins. (The word for a virgin of either sex is, paradoxically, in a masculine form *\parthenos*], with the actual gender being determined by the article or adjective attached to it.) Here, then, Paul has thrown wide the door to bringing in the example of Jesus. He is directly addressing the question of male celibacy, urging the unmarried to adhere to it, but—astonishingly—he declares that in this matter he has no instruction from the Lord. But Jesus' own status as a celibate man would have spoken volumes. How could Paul speak of having no instruction from Jesus and not think of his very lifestyle, an action that would have spoken louder than any verbal instruction?

If, on the other hand, Jesus was married, it might be no wonder that he had no instruction from him as to celibacy, yet mention of the Lord would have instantly conjured up images of Jesus being anything but celibate, images that would at the very least have interfered with the efficacy of Paul's pronouncement. And how could Paul offer "his own judgment" if it had been the very contradiction of the Lord's own behavior? For those who claim that Paul knew of a recent historical Jesus, this is a no-win situation. Indeed, it is a virtual smoking gun.

The Waters of the Jordan

The Gospels inaugurate Jesus' preaching career with a dramatic scene amid the waters of the Jordan, as Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist. Jesus immerses himself in the waters of the river, to emerge with the dove and God's voice descending upon him from heaven. Even if the Holy Spirit and the divine words were a later elaboration, they indicate that the incident of Jesus' baptism, had it been an historical event, would very soon have become invested with mythic significance.

Yet one would never know it from Paul. For Paul, baptism is the prime sacrament of Christian ritual, through which the convert dies to his old, sinful life and rises to a new one. In Romans 6:1-11 he breaks down the baptismal ritual into its mystical component parts. Yet never do any of those parts relate to the event of Jesus' own baptism. The descent of the dove into Jesus would have

provided the perfect parallel to Paul's belief that at baptism the Holy Spirit descended into the believer. The voice of God welcoming Jesus as his Beloved Son could have served to symbolize Paul's contention (as in Romans 8:14-17) that believers have been adopted as sons of God. Yet from 1st century writers like Paul we would never even know that Jesus had been baptized.

And where is the Baptist? In Christian mythology there is hardly a more commanding figure short of Jesus himself. The forerunner, the herald in camel skin coat, the scourge of the unrepentant, the strident voice crying aloud in the wilderness. Until the Gospels appear, John is truly lost in the wilderness, for no Christian writer refers to him. Even as late as the end of the 1st century, the writer of 1 Clement, an epistle sent from the church at Rome to the church at Corinth, is silent on John when he says (17:1): "Let us take pattern by those who went about in sheepskins and goatskins heralding the Messiah's coming; that is to say, Elijah, Elisha and Ezekiel among the prophets, and other famous names besides." Those other famous names he goes on to enumerate are all from the Jewish scriptures.

Ironically, it would seem that the one surviving writer of the 1st century (outside the Gospels) who does refer to John the Baptist is a non-Christian: the Jewish historian Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 18.5.2). However, he fails to make any link between John and Jesus or the Christian movement. (See ch. 33).

There was a common Jewish belief that the coming of the Messiah would be preceded by the appearance of the ancient prophet Elijah, to herald his advent. If 1st century Christian preachers were at all concerned with justifying their claim that Jesus was the Messiah, John the Baptist would have been very useful as an Elijah-type figure who had fulfilled this expectation.

Signs and Wonders

The occurrence of miracles and wondrous events was an indispensable sign of the imminence of the Kingdom. Anyone who claimed that the Day of the Lord was at hand had to produce signs and wonders to prove it. All awaited the events spoken of in prophets like Isaiah:

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
And the ears of the deaf unstopped;
Then shall the lame man leap like a hart,
And the tongue of the dumb sing for joy. (35:5f)

But thy dead live, their bodies shall rise again.
They that sleep in the earth will awake and shout for joy. (26:19)

Modern critical scholars have tended to relegate most Gospel accounts of Jesus' miracles to exaggeration, psychological response or later tradition. But such traditions should not have been long in developing if Jesus was declared to be the Messiah soon after his death.

In that case, it seems strange that Paul, in urging his readers to be confident that the advent of Christ and God's kingdom lay just around the corner (as in

Romans 8:19, 13:12), would never point to traditions about miracles by Jesus as the very fulfillment of the wonders that were expected at such a time. In 1 Corinthians 1:22 he scoffs at the Jews who always call for miracles to prove Christian claims, but here he should have had the perfect answer for such calls: the signs which Jesus himself had provided; nor would the scoffing have been appropriate.

The Epistle to the Hebrews (2:3-4) speaks of the occasion when the "announcement of salvation" was delivered. To this announcement God is said to have added his own testimony, through signs and miracles and the distribution of gifts of the Holy Spirit. Yet if this were a reference to an earthly ministry of Jesus, it would have been more natural to point to Jesus' own signs and miracles, rather than to some perceived testimony by God.

The Gospels tell us how the sick pressed to touch the hem of Jesus' garment; how they stood in the byways and called out to him as he passed, crying for deliverance from their afflictions. Jesus had shown mercy to them all, even if those who wish to bring the Gospel accounts down to earth suggest that many of these healings were psychological. But their presence in the Gospels (and in Q) shows that such things would have been expected of him, that as a preacher of the kingdom the dimension of miracle worker would inevitably have been attached to Jesus' activities. Thus, traditions about healings and other signs and wonders should almost immediately have been developed and preserved.³⁰

Yet one would never know it from James 5:15:

Is one of you ill? The prayer offered in faith will save the sick man, the Lord [meaning God] will raise him from his bed, and any sins he may have committed will be forgiven.

It is probably safe to say that the writer would not have passed up appealing to the fact that Jesus himself had done these very things, had he possessed any such traditions. Mark 2:1-12 presents us with a miracle scene in which Jesus does both. To the paralytic he says: "Take up thy bed and walk," and he pronounces the man's sins forgiven. The writer of James has clearly never heard of it.

Nor has the writer of the epistle 1 Clement. Chapter 59 contains a long prayer to God, apparently in the liturgy of the Roman church. Here is one part of it:

Grant us, O Lord, we beseech thee, thy help and protection. Do thou deliver the afflicted, pity the lowly, raise the fallen, reveal thyself to the needy, heal the sick, and bring home thy wandering people. Feed thou the hungry, ransom the captive, support the weak, comfort the faint-hearted, [trans. M. Staniforth, *Early Christian Writings*]

The Gospels tell us that Jesus did these very things, from healing the sick to feeding the hungry. In God's own name, as he walked the sands of Galilee and Judea, he pitied, he supported, he comforted, he revealed God. Yet Clement and his community show no knowledge of such activities.

Claims that Jesus had raised people from the dead are today not taken seriously by liberal scholars or the general public, but the Gospels show that the

1st century mind had no trouble accepting the actuality of such feats. If Jesus had performed healings which tradition later turned into raisings from the dead, and the Gospels are regarded as evidence of such traditions, it is perplexing that no epistle writer shows any knowledge of them. (Once again, Q shows that raisings from the dead would have been imputed to a Jesus as early as the time of Paul.)

Paul's ignorance of such things is illustrated in passages like 1 Corinthians 15:12f. Here he addresses those in Corinth who question whether human beings can be resurrected from death:

How can some of you say there is no resurrection from the dead?

Yet would Paul not have had the perfect rejoinder, proof that humans *can* come back from the dead? He could point to traditions about the revival of Jairus' daughter (Mk. 5:21-43), about the astounding emergence of Lazarus from his tomb (John 11:1-44). Lazarus might still have to die again, but an eternal resurrection would surely be seen as prefigured by the temporary ones granted by Jesus on earth, and it is difficult to think that Paul would not have appealed to them in his argument.

Nor is it likely he would have passed up an appeal to Jesus' own promises on the matter. Luke offers this saying: "You will be repaid on the day when good men rise from the dead" (14:14). The Gospel of John is pervaded by Jesus' promise that "he who believes in me will have life everlasting." Had such promises, such traditions about Jesus' miracles, been circulating in the Christian communities of Paul's day, there would have been no need for his plaintive inquiry: "How can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?"

Four decades later, neither Lazarus nor Jesus' promises have yet surfaced. 1 Clement (24, 26) offers examples *in nature* of "the process of resurrection," and God's promises that the holy and faithful shall be raised are all from scripture.

Unto the Holy City

Since no direct mention is made in the New Testament epistles to Jesus conducting an earthly ministry, it should come as no surprise that a reference to Galilee nowhere appears. At the end of his ministry, the Gospels have Jesus journey to Jerusalem where he is to meet his fate. Does anyone else in the 1st century ever place Jesus in the holy city?

The simple answer is no. Paul never locates Jesus anywhere, and for all his talk about the death and resurrection, no historical or geographical data about those events appear in his letters. Hebrews 13:11-13 says that Jesus "suffered outside the gate," but no city is mentioned, and the idea is determined by scripture. For this writer, Jesus' experience in the realm of myth is being portrayed wherever possible as paralleling the sacrificial cult established in Exodus. In verse 11-12, his suffering is paralleled with the burning of the bodies of sacrificed animals which took place "outside the camp," referring to the Israelite camp at Sinai—even though this is actually a poor parallel, since the disposal of the carcass of the animal *after* its sacrifice is not equivalent to Jesus' death which, occurring *before*, provides the blood for his own sacrifice in the

heavenly sanctuary, nor is his body destroyed. But here the author changes his motif and has Jesus dying "outside the *gate*," more than likely meaning the gate of Heaven. (It had to be changed in any case, since Jesus died neither inside nor outside any camp.) If he had meant the gate of Jerusalem, there should have been no reason for him to revert in the next verse (13) to the idea of believers joining Jesus "outside the *camp*," since joining him at the site of his death outside the gate of Jerusalem would have been a very apt metaphor.³¹

An earlier passage in Hebrews (7:1-3) also indicates that the writer possesses no concept of Jesus ever having been in or near Jerusalem. Jesus in his role as heavenly High Priest finds his archetype, his scriptural precedent, in Melchizedek. This figure was "king of Salem [i.e., Jerusalem] and priest of God Most High," as mentioned in Genesis 14:18-20. In comparing Melchizedek to Jesus in the epistle, the writer is anxious to draw every parallel he can between the two figures. Yet he fails to make what should have been an obvious comparison: that Melchizedek had officiated in the very same city where Jesus later performed his own act as High Priest—the sacrifice of himself on Calvary.

We can still shiver at the Gospel scene where Jesus makes his entry into the city, sitting humbly upon a donkey, hailed by excited crowds waving palms of peace and hope and singing from the Psalms. How the whole city would have been set abuzz by the dramatic confrontation in the Temple, when Jesus single-handedly—and with no response from the authorities³²—drove out the traders and the animal-sellers. Such things are the stuff of which legends are quickly made, tales that grow in the telling. But this cannot be judged by the 1st century epistles because these incidents are never mentioned. (Nor are they mentioned by any historian of the time, including Josephus.)

The Last Supper

Next to the crucifixion, the Gospel scene most immortalized in many centuries of Christian art is undoubtedly that of Jesus sitting at table with his twelve apostles gathered about him, partaking of a Supper which was to be both a last and a first. It was the last communal meal he would enjoy with his followers. But it would be the first sacramental meal in a perpetual celebration of his death, embodying a theology of atonement and salvation founded on Jesus' sacrifice. It was, in Jesus' own words, the establishment of a new covenant.

Yet in the epistle to the Hebrews 9:19-20, we read:

For when, as the Law directed, Moses had recited all the commandments to the people, he took the blood of the calves, with water, scarlet wool, and marjoram, and sprinkled the law-book itself and all the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant which God has enjoined upon you." [NEB]

At the core of this writer's theology lies the new covenant established by Christ's sacrifice, a sacrifice which has taken place in Heaven. His interpretative technique centers on drawing parallels between his own community's theology and ritual, and the embodiment or prototype of these found in the scriptures. Yet the prime scriptural event which had established the old covenant, the blood

sacrifice of animals conducted by Moses and the words spoken over this ritual (Exodus 24:8), is presented without a glance toward Jesus' own establishment of the new covenant, in the words he is reported to have spoken over the bread and wine at the Last Supper.

The parallel between the old and the new, the very striking similarity between the words spoken by Moses in Exodus and the words spoken by the Gospel Jesus at the sacramental meal which established the celebration of his sacrifice, should have been so compelling that the author could not have avoided calling attention to them. The only conclusion to be drawn is that he knew of no such event, and no such words spoken by Jesus at a Last Supper.

Once again, the passage concerning Melchizedek in Hebrews 7:1-3 shows an ignorance on the part of the writer, this time about the Supper. The passage from Genesis mentioned above (14:18-20) begins: "Then Melchizedek...brought food and wine." Despite his concern for parallels between the two figures, between his own brand of Christian theology and its embodiment in the sacred writings, the writer fails to point to this "food and wine" as a prefiguring of the bread and cup of the eucharistic sacrament established by Jesus.

The Christian document compiled toward the end of the 1st century known as the Didache ("Teaching," later described as "of the Twelve Apostles") also contains a silence on Jesus' establishment of the Eucharist. In chapters 9-10, community prayers attached to a communal thanksgiving meal are quoted. Here the bread and the wine have no sacramental significance and there is no mention of Jesus' death, nor is he said to have instituted this ceremony. In fact, there is no reference to any aspect of Jesus' life and death in the Didache. Jesus' role in the theology of this community seems to be nothing more than a kind of conduit from God, as indicated by this passage, quoting a verse from the prayers:

At the Eucharist, offer the eucharistic prayer in this way. Begin with the chalice: "We give thanks to thee, our Father, for the holy vine of thy servant David, which thou has made known to us through thy servant [or child] Jesus." [trans. Staniforth, *op.cit.*]

Since no mention is made of any of Jesus' teachings, with even the Lord's Prayer and the community's "gospel" attributed to God (see Appendix 8), we must assume that any "making known" by Jesus is through spiritual channels.

Finally, the epistle 1 Clement can speak of the community's "eucharist to God" (ch.41) with no reference to a ritual meal based on Jesus' Last Supper.

This leaves us with 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. Paul calls the meal "The Lord's Supper" (11:20), a term found nowhere else in the New Testament. In chapter 4 it was seen that the opening words of the verse imply knowledge of this scene through personal revelation, not historical tradition, and in chapter 11, after examining the sacred meals of other savior god cults, it will be judged to be an origin myth of the same nature, probably created by Paul himself. In view of the universal silence in the rest of the early literature on anything like a Last Supper, Paul is even less likely to be referring to a tradition about an historical event.³³

The Passion Story

We continue our survey of the epistolary silence on the Gospel story and examine the trial, crucifixion and resurrection, followed by a look at one very revealing missing element.

Of Agony and Betrayal

See to it that there is no one among you who forfeits the grace of God, no bitter, noxious weed growing up to poison the whole, no immoral person, no one worldly-minded like Esau. He sold his birthright for a single meal, and you know that although he wanted afterwards to claim the blessing, he was rejected. [Heb. 12:15-17, NEB]

Dante in his *Inferno* places Judas in the pit of Hell, locked in ice, gnawed on by Satan. The arch-betrayer who planted his deceitful kiss on Jesus' cheek and helped deliver him to death was to become a symbol in later Christian minds of all false-hearted and disbelieving Jewry. Judas inaugurated the Jew as demon, and an entire race suffered fiercely for it over two millennia. Yet before he appears to fill his treacherous role in Mark's passion story, no ghost of Judas haunts the Christian landscape. He is notably missing from the above passage in Hebrews, where the selling of the Lord himself for 30 pieces of silver by a man embittered, jealous and deceitful, would have been a far more apt symbol of the bitter, poisonous weed that arises unchecked within the community of the holy.

Nor would a reference to Judas have been out of place in Paul's own presentation of his Lord's Supper. Here he is criticizing the Corinthians for their behavior at the communal meal. He speaks of rivalry and "divided groups," of those who "eat the bread and drink the cup of the Lord unworthily." If anyone had been guilty of such things, it was surely Judas at the very first Supper.

The writer of 1 Clement also deals with the theme of jealousy, but to his list of Old Testament figures who suffered at the hands of jealous men, he fails to add Jesus himself, betrayed by the perfidious apostle in his own company.

The Gospels give us other, less unforgivable moments of betrayal on the night of Jesus' arrest. The great triple denial of his Master by Peter himself, with the bitter remorse which followed as the cock crew, is nowhere referred to in the epistles. Paul can show outbursts of anger and disdain toward Peter and others of the Jerusalem group (as in Galatians 2), but never does he bring up a denial of the Lord by Peter to twist the knife. Earlier in the story, the favored three of Peter, James and John had slept through their Master's agony in the Gethsemane

garden, a beautifully crafted and emotionally effective scene of Jesus kneeling before God in naked isolation, fearing the ordeal in store and wishing in some part of his humanity that it could be put aside. Paul never mentions it. Nor do any of the other epistles, which often deal with situations in which Christians are in danger of falling away from their resolve and devotion.

From Death to Life

For 2000 years the icon of the cross has towered over Western society. It has defined our philosophy, our ethics, our psychologies, our art. It has governed our spiritual beliefs and expectations. Scarcely anyone born in the western world over the last two millennia has not had the shadow of the crucifix fall on his or her life in one way or another. A man hanging from a piece of wood: the image is so familiar, so much a part of our world, adorning our walls and decorating our persons, that we have lost the gut-wrenching sense of just how gruesome it is, or the wonder that upon such an image so many have laid their hopes.

It would be strange indeed to find that the cross was not a universal motif in all Christian expression from the very birth of the faith. The cross and the empty tomb: together they formed the twin pillars of Christian trust in salvation. Together they provided the explosive catalyst for the religious movement which turned a Jewish preacher into the Son of God and brought the message about him to the far corners of the earth. Or so we would be forgiven for thinking.

But the fact is that both the death of Jesus and his rising from the tomb are missing in significant pieces of Christian witness. Not, it is true, in Paul. There is no shortage of Christ crucified in everything Paul has to say about Jesus; and his resurrection from the dead forms the basis of the Pauline hope for immortality. Yet the point has been made that Paul nowhere places this death and resurrection in an historical earthly setting. Nor do any of the other epistle writers.

Outside the New Testament, several documents judged to be Christian show no sign of a Christ who died and was resurrected. We have already encountered one of these, the *Didache*. Others include the *Shepherd of Hermas* and the *Odes of Solomon*. (These and other documents will be looked at more closely in Part Six, which considers the great diversity that existed in earliest Christianity.)

Within the New Testament itself, one of the underlying sources of many of the sayings in both Matthew and Luke, the Q document which forms the basis of the Galilean Tradition, will be seen to have contained no concept of a Jesus who suffered and died, let alone one who was resurrected. A non-canonical document related to early Q, the *Gospel of Thomas*, also presents a collection of sayings attributed to Jesus showing no awareness that he had undergone death. For all its focus on "eternal life," 1 John has nothing to say about the resurrection, and even the specific concept of the cross is missing. In the latest layer of this epistle, allusions to the idea of sacrificial propitiation creep in, and 3:16 declares that "Christ laid down his life for us," but that is the closest one gets to Calvary. The earlier strata display the idea that eternal life is gained through knowledge of the Son, the original Johannine idea, not by any atoning death.

The epistle of James is judged to be Christian on the basis of its sole reference in 2:1 to "the Lord Jesus Christ, who reigns in glory," and because so many of its moral maxims bear strong resemblance to the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels, even though they are never attributed to him. But the death and the resurrection of James' shadowy Christ are missing. And not because there was no occasion to bring them up. In 1:21 the writer urges his readers to "accept the message implanted (in you) which can bring you salvation." It is the reception of an ethical message which "saves your souls," not Jesus' atoning sacrifice or his rising from death. About these things James has nothing to say.

When in 5:10 the author advocates "patience under ill-treatment," does he offer the obvious example of Jesus in his passion? No, he says: "Take the prophets of old who spoke in the name of the Lord." In 5:6 he condemns the rich and powerful of this world and their injustices toward the poor and the disadvantaged: "You have condemned the innocent (man) and murdered him; he offers no resistance." No parallel with Jesus' own experience seems to have crossed the writer's mind here.

The Didache, as noted, has nothing to say about a death and resurrection for Jesus (who appears only in its thanksgiving prayers). The Epistle to the Hebrews, while focusing on Jesus' sacrifice, places it in the heavenly sanctuary, with no mention of Calvary. The name Calvary appears not once in the New Testament epistles. Hebrews also turns a blind eye on the Easter miracle; 13:20 has a passing reference to God 'leading up' Jesus after death, but this hardly conveys the drama of the empty tomb or the post-resurrection appearances. In 7:16 the author extols Jesus as one who owes his priesthood "to the power of a life that cannot be destroyed." Is this founded on Jesus' conquest of death through his resurrection? No such idea is offered. Instead, the remark is based on a scriptural passage, Psalm 110:4 with its comparison to Melchizedek, declaring: "Thou art a priest forever."

A Trial and Crucifixion Scene

The Gospel details of Jesus' trial and crucifixion are imbedded in our cultural heritage, from Pilate to the crown of thorns, from the raising up of the cross between two thieves to the gambling of the soldiers for Jesus' clothes, from the darkness over the land at his death to Joseph of Arimathea laying Jesus in his own tomb. Yet none of these details surface in the wider Christian picture before the 2nd century. "We preach Christ crucified," says Paul. But he does not tell us where or when, or that Roman or Jew was involved. None of the great cast of characters that pass through the various stages of the Gospel trial and crucifixion are ever mentioned in his letters. Paul does not even tell us that Jesus was *tried*.

No one quotes any words of Jesus at the crucifixion. Ephesians 4:32 urges that Christians "forgive one another as God in Christ forgave you." The writer is apparently unaware of the moving words which Luke gives us (23:34), spoken by Jesus as he hung on the cross, words which would have provided a noble example to follow:

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

The writer of 1 Clement (53:4), after a long dissertation on forgiveness, searches for words to sum up his point. They are not the words of Jesus on the cross, but the plea of Moses to God that he forgive the disobedient Israelites.

If Jesus on his cross *did* speak such words of forgiveness, Christians failed to heed them. For almost 2000 years the Jews endured vilification, hatred and outright slaughter as "killers of Christ." The author of the Gospel of Matthew (and he alone) dramatizes their frenzied cry at Jesus' trial, words which drew down upon them the wrath of the ages: "Crucify him! His blood be upon us and upon our children!" Would the Jews take any consolation in realizing that no one before the Gospels shows any conception that they had been involved in Christ's death? It is worth repeating here that 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16, where Paul seems to condemn the Jews "who killed the Lord Jesus," is widely judged to be a later Christian insertion (see Appendix 1).

As discussed earlier, Paul has given himself the ideal opening to mention the Jews' killing of Jesus in Romans 11 when he is discussing the guilt of the Jews in regard to their lack of faith. He refers to Elijah's words in 1 Kings: "Lord, they have killed thy prophets." This guilt apparently does not include the killing of the very Son of God, for Paul makes no mention of such an event.

If Paul and his contemporaries attribute no guilt to the Jews in the death of Jesus, how do they view the Romans? In Mark's Gospel tale, Judas may be the villain from within, and the Sanhedrin the Jewish religious authority which wanted Jesus eliminated, but Pilate was the figurehead of imperial justice who carried out the execution. All the Gospels, for tendentious reasons, render Pontius Pilate a complex character and largely whitewash him of responsibility for a death other forces made inevitable. (To think that Pilate, in the face of Jesus admitting or declaring himself a "king," could nevertheless find him innocent goes against all logic.) But can we imagine that this man, had he enjoyed any role in the death of Jesus, would immediately sink from Christian consciousness for some three-quarters of a century? What of Pilate's struggle to free a man he believed was blameless, his dramatic gesture when he washed his hands of Jesus' blood? What of his offer to release Jesus, only to be refused by a crowd who demanded Barabbas instead? Could these dramatic elements have proven of no interest to the first three generations of Christians who based their faith on the event of Jesus' execution?

In fact, the Gospel incident of the release of the criminal Barabbas is entirely unbelievable. The claim that Pilate had a custom at festival time of setting free one prisoner of the public's choosing is flatly rejected by many scholars. Apart from there being no other evidence for it, it goes against all Roman policy and character, and certainly does not fit what we know of Pilate himself from other sources. Rather, it is a transparent device on Mark's part to have the Jewish crowd choose a rebel and murderer over their own Messiah.

It would be some 80 years before the Gospel Pilate first came to light in the letters of Ignatius. It may have been around the same time that the sole reference

to Pilate in the New Testament epistles was penned, in 1 Timothy 6:13. Even here, there are indications that this may be a later insertion (see Appendix 1).

A figure like Pilate seems far from Paul's mind when he says:

Rulers hold no terrors for them who do right...(the ruler) is the minister of God for your own good. [Romans 13:3-4]

Could Paul have any knowledge of Jesus' historical trial and crucifixion and still express such sentiments? Pilate, whether he believed in Jesus' innocence or not, delivered this righteous man to scourging and unjust execution. If the story of such a fate suffered by Jesus of Nazareth were present in every Christian's mind, Paul's praise of the authorities as God's agents for the good of all, and from whom the innocent have nothing to fear, would ring hollow indeed.

In fact, all the early writers lack the essential atmosphere of the Gospel presentation of Jesus' death: that this was the unjust execution of an innocent man, beset by betrayal and false accusations and a pitiless establishment. Instead, Paul in Romans 8:32 extols the magnanimity of God who "did not spare his own Son but surrendered him for us all." And for the writer of Ephesians it is Christ himself who in love "gave himself up on your behalf as an offering and a sacrifice whose fragrance is pleasing to God" (5:2). Wherever Paul and others in the 1st century envisioned this sacrifice as having taken place, it seems light-years from the dread hill of Golgotha, from the scourges and the plaited thorns, the jeering soldiers and taunting crowds, where God expresses his dark wrath in earthquake, blackened heavens and a rending of the veil to his own holy sanctuary.

And On the Third Day

All the Gospels conclude with the climactic story of the empty tomb and—except for Mark in its original version—an account of various appearances by the risen Christ to his disciples. The Acts of the Apostles has Jesus continue to appear on earth for forty days. How do the 1st century letter writers view the tradition of the Easter miracle?

Most early Christian thinking seems to have envisioned Jesus as ascending to Heaven immediately after his death. Scholars admit that the epistle writers show no concept of a bodily resurrection after three days, or of a period during which Jesus made appearances to human beings on earth. Such a blind spot would be difficult to conceive, if we accept the orthodox picture of a Christian movement which began in response to a perceived return of Jesus from the grave.

Yet that blindness seems clear in passages like the following:

In the flesh he was put to death; in the spirit he was brought to life... (Baptism) brings salvation through the resurrection of Jesus Christ who entered heaven after receiving the submission of angelic authorities and powers, and is now at the right hand of God. [NEB]

Here the writer of 1 Peter (3:18-22) can mention something which took place in the spirit realm in the course of Christ's ascension to Heaven, but he has nothing

to say about Jesus' bodily appearances on earth. (The meaning of this verse's "in flesh" will be examined in Part Four.)

Or Ephesians 1:20:

...which (God) exerted in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, when he enthroned him at his right hand in the heavenly realms. [NEB]

There is even less room for a resurrection to earth in Hebrews 10:12: "Christ offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, and took his seat at the right hand of God." In 13:20, the writer has God "lead up" Jesus from the dead. Both verses illustrate Hebrews' lack of any concept of bodily resurrection.

Then He Appeared To

Does Paul have any idea of a bodily return of Jesus to earth? Does his concept of the resurrection progress beyond the documents just examined?

In 1 Corinthians 15:5-8, after a capsule summary of the gospel he preaches, Paul goes on to list a series of "appearances" by Christ to various people in Jerusalem. The nature of those appearances cannot be squared with the Gospel picture. Paul nowhere shows any knowledge of the story of the empty tomb. He makes no mention of the women who first discover it, nor of details matching any of the appearance stories of the Gospels. On the other hand, the appearances to James and to "over 500 of the brothers at once" seem to be unknown to the Gospel writers.

Throughout this description, Paul uses the word *ophthe* (was seen): Jesus was seen by so-and-so. There is no evidence that he means anything more than a simple vision, and this is borne out when Paul lists his own "seeing" with the rest. He makes no distinction between them (nor, as pointed out earlier, does he do so when he speaks of "seeing the Lord" in 9:1). Since his own experience of the risen Christ—even as described in Acts—is a vision from heaven of the disembodied, spiritual Christ, it would seem that they have all experienced the same thing. Modern liberal scholars, such as the Jesus Seminar,³⁴ have come to acknowledge that all these appearances were in the nature of visions.

Even this may be too strong a word. In a comprehensive study of the meaning of *ophthe*, a passive aorist (past tense) of the verb *horad*, to see, the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (vol.V, p.358) points out that in this type of context the word is a technical term for being "in the presence of revelation as such, without reference to the nature of its perception." In other words, the "seeing" may not refer to actual sensory perception. Rather, it may simply be "an encounter with the risen Lord who reveals himself...they experienced his presence." If what we have here is more an experience of Christ's "presence" than a full-blown hallucinatory vision, this would make it easier to accept that so many individuals and even large groups (such as the "more than 500 brothers" in 1 Corinthians 15:6) could imagine that they had undergone such an experience.³⁵

Apologists place crucial importance on this passage, and it usually involves some form of special pleading. Eddy and Boyd (*op.cit.*, p.207) argue:

the Christ myth understanding of the resurrection appearances has to accept that the 'appearances' were psychological projections or hallucinations. There are numerous problems with this suggestion, however, not least of which is that it flies in the face of the first-century Jewish understanding of resurrection. When Jews thought of resurrection, they thought of a *bodily* resurrection in history, not a mystical vision.

While the latter claim may be correct, such expectation lay within the context of resurrection for *humans*, not of a god—and of humans on earth, not of a god in a supernatural location. Eddy and Boyd also ignore the common nature of 'religious experience' which is very much a matter of psychological projection and imagination—even hallucination. (Consider the so-called Fatima miracle in 1917. Under a hot sun in an atmosphere of excitement and expectation, a crowd of thousands 'witnessed' the sun approaching the earth in an otherwise undocumented astronomical phenomenon.)

Eddy and Boyd speak of the Jewish tradition about the concept of "*bodily* resurrection." But as we have just seen, that 'tradition' is nowhere in evidence in the epistles in regard to Jesus' own resurrection. If such a belief about Jesus existed in the early Christian community, why does not a single one of these Jewish writers focus on this aspect of Jesus' rising from the dead—that it took place in flesh? In fact, why is the language of 1 Corinthians 15:5-8 precisely that of "mystical vision"? Moreover, while scholarship recognizes the incompatibility between the specific Gospel accounts of post-resurrection appearances and those of Paul (casting doubt on the accuracy of the former), we should expect that if the early Christian community possessed traditions—authentic or otherwise—of *some* sort of bodily activities by Jesus on earth following his resurrection, their importance and the natural interest attached to such activities would surely have led to some reference to them by the epistle writers. Particularly so, as they would have involved experiences by the disciples and other people who were still alive, people who would have been valued for that contact with the risen Jesus. (Mary Magdalene is not someone who would have gone into eclipse for over a century.) They would have constituted an invaluable witness to the rising of this man from his grave, crucial for apostolic success and debate. Yet there is no sign of this dimension anywhere in the writings of earliest Christianity, and certainly not in a key passage like 1 Corinthians 15:5-7, where everything is simply a "seeing" of Jesus and no activities by him.

Eddy and Boyd also argue:

There is certainly nothing *in the text* to suggest a long span of time between Jesus' resurrection and the appearances Paul talks about. Wedging an indefinite span of time and a different realm between verse 4, when Christ died and rose, and verse 5, when he 'appeared' to the disciples, seems very unnatural.

But it is only 'unnatural' when one brings unexamined assumptions to the text. The issue is not one of an intervening span of time, whether the text suggests it

or not. If Paul's gospel is something he has derived from scripture, as he seems to tell us in verses 3 and 4, relating to spiritual world activities whose location in time is indeterminate, then the 'visions' relate only to *knowledge* about those activities, a confirmation of them through an experience of the spiritual Christ who had performed them. A temporal relationship between the two is not Paul's concern, and is in fact irrelevant and even inapplicable.

Moreover, we must avoid reading an unnecessary sequence between verses 4 and 5. Virtually every defender maintains that there is a flow through the passage, in the repeat of the words "and that" as though implying it is all-of-a-piece; yet there are several considerations which force us to break things up.

In 15:1, Paul has undertaken to "remind you of the gospel that I preached to you; the gospel which you received...and which is bringing you salvation." That gospel is contained within verses 3 and 4. Let's lay out the passage:

- ³For I **delivered** to you, as of prime importance, what also I **received**:
that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures,
- ⁴and that he was buried,
- and that he has been raised on the third day according to the scriptures,
- ⁵and that he was seen (*ophthe*) by Cephas, then by the twelve;
- ⁶afterward he was seen by over 500 brothers at one time, most of whom
are still alive, though some have fallen asleep;
- ⁷afterward he was seen by James, then by all the apostles;
- ⁸last of all, as to one abnormally born, he was seen by me as well.

As argued earlier (ch. 4), taking into account Paul's declaration in Galatians 1:11-12 that his gospel was received from no man, the "received" in verse 3 must refer to revelation and scripture (*kata tas graphas*, according to the scriptures) as the source of his gospel. Thus verses 5-8 cannot follow on the "received," since Paul would not be saying that he learned of the appearances to various people through revelation. Furthermore, that list of appearance traditions, including Paul's own, is hardly to be styled part of the "gospel" and certainly does not in itself bring salvation. It may be useful in convincing people of the veracity of the gospel, but it is not necessary that the Corinthians specifically believe that Christ appeared to James, Peter, 500 brethren, and Paul, in order to be saved. (Some commentators have remarked on the inappropriateness of this, and feel that some kind of disjunction must be intended after verse 4.) Thus what is governed by the "received" idea ends with verse 4, and that is scriptural revelation.

What the "seeing" verses are governed by is the "delivered to you" idea. This is the primary thought governing the entire passage, one that gives it a (limited) unity from verses 3 to 8. Paul has said that he will "remind" the Corinthians of what he has previously told (delivered to) them, the gospel by which they are saved and to which they hold fast. Since this is an 'occasional' writing, apparently dictated, Paul has not carefully planned things out ahead of time. He encapsulates his gospel of Christ dying and rising, and then—perhaps only on the spur of the moment—goes on to include the visions, not as part of what he 'received by revelation' nor as required doctrine which grants salvation to his

converts and on which they stand firm, but as additional things he has previously told them (giving us verse 5's "and that"—assuming that the text has not undergone corruption in the two centuries before we have manuscript evidence of it). He adds them because those 'seeings' are in the nature of supporting evidence for his gospel, corroboration for the revelation.³⁶

And while the terms and verbs of "receiving" and "delivering" are in some contexts the language of passed-on oral and historical tradition, their meanings here must be determined by how Paul uses these terms in general for his own purposes. As in the case of most new paradigms, a reorientation of thinking is needed in order to understand and consider new interpretations of passages which have too long enjoyed only one way of being viewed.

We also have to take into account something which Paul says a few verses later (15:12-16):

¹²But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. ¹⁵Moreover, we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we witnessed against God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. [NASB/NIV]

There are some powerful implications to be drawn from this passage. Paul expresses himself as though the raising of Christ from the dead is a matter of faith, not of historical record as evidenced by eyewitness to a physical, risen Jesus at Easter. He is so adamant about the necessity to believe that the dead will be raised, that he is prepared to state—and he repeats it four times—that if they are not, then Christ himself "has not been raised." If men he knew had witnessed the actual return of Jesus from the grave, it is unlikely he would have thought to make even a rhetorical denial of it.

Moreover, the verb for "witness" (*martureo*) is often used in the sense of witnessing *to* something, that is, declaring one's belief in an item of faith, not of factual record (though it can mean the latter in some contexts). Compare Romans 10:9:

If (you have) in your heart the faith that God raised (Jesus) from the dead, then you will find salvation.

There, too, Paul seems to be implying that the raising of Jesus is a matter of faith. In 1 Thessalonians 4:14, where Paul says that "we believe Jesus died and rose again," even Jesus' *death* seems to be a matter of faith.

Such a meaning of "witness" in the 1 Corinthians passage above (verse 15) is strongly supported by what follows this verb: *kata tou theou*, or "against God." Translators often seem uncertain of the exact import of this phrase (the NEB's "we are...false witnesses of God"), but Bauer's lexicon declares it as meaning "give testimony *in contradiction to God*." The idea that Paul is trying to get

across here is that if in fact God did *not* raise Jesus from death (which would have to be the conclusion, he says, if the human dead are not raised) then, rhetorically speaking, Paul and other apostles have been misinterpreting and contradicting God and lying when they say Jesus was resurrected.

Paul is saying that knowledge about Jesus' raising has come from God, and that his own preaching testimony, true or false, relates to information which has come from God—in other words, through revelation (i.e., in the scriptures). Not history, not apostolic tradition about recent events on earth. In all this discussion about the actuality of Christ's resurrection, Paul's standard is one of faith, faith based on God's testimony—in the sacred writings. The latter is the fundamental source of knowledge derived from God. Historical human witness plays no part.

As will be seen in Part Four, the events of Christ's death and resurrection took place in the supernatural realm of myth, and thus there is no temporal link between such events and the "appearances" in 1 Corinthians 15:5-8. Paul is in the same position as the other early Christian writers. He possesses no concept of an interval between the resurrection and ascension to Heaven, no idea that Christ had spent time on earth during such an interval, and no details about anything Jesus might have done or said at such a time. The graphic scenes which Gospels like John give us, with the unbelieving Thomas placing his fingers against Jesus' pierced hands and sides, are utterly unknown to Paul. A "doubting Thomas" would have been an invaluable asset to him in arguing against the doubting Corinthians.

In the Footsteps of Jesus

From Bethlehem to Calvary, there is a resounding void on the places and details of Jesus' life and death which resonates throughout the entire record of early Christian correspondence. And yet there is one striking and pervasive silence which seems paramount. It can be summed up in one question: Where are the holy places?

In all the Christian writers of the 1st century, in all the devotion they display about Christ and the new faith, not one of them expresses a desire to see the birthplace of Jesus, to visit Nazareth his home town. No one talks about having been to the sites of his preaching, the upper room where he held his Last Supper, the hill on which he was crucified, or the tomb where he was laid and rose from the dead. Not only is there no evidence that anyone showed an interest in visiting such places, they go completely unmentioned. The words Bethlehem, Nazareth and Galilee never appear in the epistles, and the word Jerusalem is never used in connection with Jesus.

Most astonishing of all, there is not a hint of pilgrimage to Calvary itself, where humanity's salvation had presumably been consummated. How could such a place not have become the center of Christian devotion, how could it not have been turned into a shrine? Each year at Passover one would expect to find Christians observing a celebration on the hill outside Jerusalem, performing a rite every Easter Sunday at the site of the nearby tomb. Christian sermonizing

and theological meditation could hardly fail to be built around the *places* of salvation, not just the abstract events.

Do Christians avoid frequenting such places out of fear? Acts portrays the apostles as preaching fearlessly in the Temple in the earliest days, despite arrest and persecution, and the latter has in any case been much exaggerated for the early decades. But even such a threat should not and would not have prevented clandestine visits by Christians, and there should have been many other places of Jesus' career where visitation would have involved no danger. In any case, there would have been no danger in *mentioning* them in their own correspondence.

How could Paul have been immune to the lure of such places? In Philippians 3:10, he says:

All I care for is to know Christ, to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings.

And yet, does he care enough to visit the hill of Calvary upon his conversion, to experience those sufferings the more vividly, to feel beneath his feet the sacred ground that bore the blood of his slain Lord? Does he stand before the empty tomb, the better to bring home to himself the power of Jesus' resurrection, to feel the conviction that his own resurrection is guaranteed? This is a man whose letters reveal someone full of insecurities and self-doubts, possessed by his own demons, highly emotional, a man driven to preach else he would go mad, as he tells us in 1 Corinthians 9:16. Would he not have derived great consolation from visiting the Gethsemane garden, where Jesus was reported to have passed through similar horrors and self-doubts? Would his sacramental convictions about the Lord's Supper, which he is anxious to impart to the Corinthians (1 1:23f), not have been heightened by a visit to the upper room in Jerusalem, to absorb the ambience of that hallowed place and occasion?

This type of consideration provides yet another reason to render unacceptable the standard rationalization that Paul was uninterested in the earthly life of Jesus. Moreover, when he undertook to carry his mission to the gentiles, surely he would have wanted—and needed—to go armed with the data of that life, with knowledge—and memories—of the places Jesus had frequented, where he had died and returned to life, ready to answer the inevitable questions his new audiences would ask in their eagerness to hear all the details about the man who was the Son of God and Savior of the world. (Again, see Appendix 2.)

Instead, what did he do? As seen in Galatians 1:17-19, he waited three years following his conversion before making a short visit to Jerusalem,

to get to know Cephas. I stayed with him for fifteen days, without seeing any of the other apostles except James, the brother of the Lord.

Nor was he to return there for another fourteen years. Did Paul learn all the data of Jesus' life on that one occasion? Did he visit the holy places? Not having felt the urge to do so for three years, his silence on such things may not be surprising. But if he did make his own pilgrimage to Calvary and the empty tomb, can we believe he would not have shared those experiences—and they

would have been intensely emotional ones—with his readers? If not here, then at *some* point in his many letters?

But it is not only the places of Jesus' life and death that are missing in the early record. What about the relics? Jesus' clothes, the things he used in his everyday life, the things he touched? Why would such items not have remained behind, to be collected and prized, clamored for, to be seen and touched by the faithful themselves? Would not an apostle like Paul be anxious to carry such a memento of the god-man he preached? Would not a rivalry develop between apostles, between Christian communities (as it did much later), to gain such mementos and relics for worship and as status symbols? If the Gospel account had any basis, we would expect to find mention of all sorts of relics, genuine or fake: cups from the Last Supper, nails bearing Jesus' flesh, thorns from the bloody crown, the centurion's spear, pieces of cloth from the garments gambled over by the soldiers at the foot of the cross—indeed, just as we find a host of relics all through the Middle Ages that were claimed to be these very things.

Why is it only in the 4th century that pieces of the "true cross" begin to surface? Why is it left until Constantine to set up the first shrine on the supposed mount of Jesus' death, and to begin the mania for pilgrimage to the holy sites that has persisted to this day? Why would someone in the first hundred years of the movement not have similarly sought to tread the same ground that the Son of God himself had so recently walked on? The total absence of such things in the first hundred years of Christian correspondence is perhaps the single strongest argument for regarding the entire Gospel account of Jesus' life and death as nothing but literary fabrication.

Of critical scholarship, which has begun to admit that much of the Gospel story—and virtually all of the passion account—is indeed fabrication,³⁷ we might ask: if not the Gospel story (most of it derived from scripture), why not some other? Why not places and relics relating to Jesus' *actual* experiences? Could Paul and the Jerusalem Tradition have believed in and preached an historical man who had undergone death and resurrection, without these events being attached to *some* location? If a "genuine Jesus" had lived and preached and died under any circumstances at all, would the memory of the places associated with his career have been completely lost, would they have been of no interest to Christians? If it is said that in fact nothing of Jesus' life was known by early Christianity—a fallback position that is increasingly being suggested—what created the vitality which launched the movement in the first place, what kept it alive in such a biographical vacuum? At the very least, the need for a story about the man they all preached would soon have generated a legendary or fictitious biography, and thus we are led back once again to a Gospel-like situation, to a quandary of silence over the events and places and relics of such a career. In any case, that the Jerusalem Tradition could have begun based on an historical man's death and imagined rising, with yet nothing of historical circumstance known about those events, is a proposition which does not logically commend itself.

Part Three

THE GOSPEL OF THE SON

8

The Word of God in the Holy Book

As outlined in Part One, several passages in the New Testament epistles declare that Christ and his activities are God's secrets, things hidden for long ages (Romans 16:25, Col. 1:26, 2:2, Eph. 3:5, Titus 1:3). Only now are they being made known to inspired apostles like Paul through revelation and the Spirit. The events of the present time are not the life and acts of Jesus on earth, but the actions of God, the arrival of faith, the sending of the spirit of the Son. But if God is revealing Christ, whence came the content of the revelation? In the case of Paul or any other Jewish prophet, it was the ancient body of Jewish scripture.

Revealed Through the Sacred Writings

One of the impediments to an acceptance of the myth theory is the apparent incredibility of the proposition that faith in Paul's Jesus the Son (and by extension, the Gospel Jesus) could have arisen with no historical basis. But we have to realize how much the educated ancient Jew lived within his holy books, as did many of those gentiles who attached themselves to Judaism. The Jewish scriptures offered a universe in themselves, in which the avid scholar and prophet could move and breathe. He governed his life by the writings. Like the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria, he could construct whole philosophies from elements of scripture, aided at times by mystical experiences.

Ancient philosophy as a whole, its view of the universe and of God, was the product of purely intellectual contemplation. Modern principles of scientific observation and experiment were virtually unknown. True reality lay outside the observable world; ultimate truths were reached through the rejection of the world and the abandonment of the body. God was believed to communicate first through his scriptures, second—for those fortunate enough to be blessed with such things—through visionary revelation.

The bible was God's revelation of himself and his workings. The most important aspect of those workings was the divine plan for salvation. God's plan had to reside in scripture, for that was how he communicated with the world. All

it needed was the right key, the right inspiration through the Spirit to unlock that coded information. Thus the writings of the prophets were regarded not as meant for their own time, not as relating to conditions they themselves had lived through (which, of course, in all cases they were), but as prophecies of the future. Inevitably, that future was taken to be the period of those who were studying these writings. God's prophetic message was meant for themselves. Paul's conviction that the Spirit was guiding him as he sought meaning from the sacred texts guaranteed that he would get the message he was looking for.

For several centuries, Judaism had asked the question: How was God to save his people? Who would be the agents involved? In many people's minds, that agent would be an Anointed king, the Messiah, a descendant of David. The Greek word for "Anointed One" is Christ. It is not a proper name, but a designation, a title. Strictly speaking, the Christian icon should be referred to not as Jesus Christ, but as Jesus *the* Christ. Jews regarded the information about this anticipated Messiah as having been embodied in prophetic and other writings, and the number of passages taken to refer to him grew in proportion to the number of those who searched for such things.

For most Jews, the Messiah would be a human figure, though one destined to be exalted by God. For others, however, the agent of salvation became more spiritual. The "one like a son of man" in Daniel 7 offered itself as a divine, or semi-divine savior figure. In the latter 1st century, such an End-time agent of God surfaces in Q and the Book of Revelation, and eventually in all the canonical Gospels. Among Jewish sects he puts in an appearance in the documents 4 Ezra and 1 Enoch, showing that even purely Jewish groups had begun to envision a Messiah figure who was more than human, someone waiting in Heaven for the great day to arrive when he would bring about God's salvation of the righteous.

For example, we read in 1 Enoch 62:5-7:

And pain shall seize them when they see that Son of Man sitting on the throne of his glory. Kings, governors, and all the landlords shall (try to) bless, glorify, extol him who rules over everything, him who has been concealed. For the Son of Man was concealed from the beginning, and the Most High One preserved him in the presence of his power; then he revealed him to the holy and the elect ones. (Translation by E. Isaac in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol.1, p.35.)

Some scholars see this section of 1 Enoch (37-71, the "Similitudes") as a Christian composition, presuming to identify its Son of Man as a Christian element. But this, along with the concept of a heavenly Messiah, should be seen as ideas not exclusively Christian but of Jewish sectarian provenance. This heavenly Son of Man reached the Gospels and Jesus through the Q community which, taking a page from precedents indicated in Enoch and ultimately Daniel, expected his coming at the imminent End-time they were preaching. When the Q community, as we shall see, developed a founder figure and applied its expected Son of Man to him, he was ready to enter the Gospels as embodied in the human Jesus. Mark expanded on his significance and role.

It is thus reasonable to regard Christianity, in its earliest forms, not as a response to a human man, but as a religious and philosophical expression of the same nature, a product of its time, growing out of earlier phases of thought. These varied circles of Christ belief encompassed an unknown number of uncoordinated Jewish and gentile groups in Palestine and throughout the empire. They offered a spiritual Savior, a fully divine Son of God. Some of the same scriptural passages which more 'mainstream' Jews interpreted as referring to a future human Messiah were seen as pointing to a spiritual Christ (*Christos*), a Son of God waiting in Heaven for the End-time when he would appear on earth.

To this heavenly Christ or Son, some of these circles—though not all, as we shall see—gave the name "Jesus" (Joshua/Yeshua), the name of the deliverer under Moses who conquered the Promised Land. The name means "Yahweh Saves" and makes an ideal and natural name for a savior deity. Some of these circles—though again not all—envisioned this Jesus as having undergone self-sacrifice in the supernatural world, the same realm where the activities of other savior gods of the era were now seen as having taken place. That this Son and Christ had died by crucifixion (some refer to it only as "hanging on a tree"), that he had risen from death, could be found in the sacred scriptures.

A Gospel from Scripture

In more than one passage, Paul tells us quite clearly that he has derived his information and gospel about the Christ from the scriptures. In 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, the fact that "Christ died for our sins," that "he was raised on the third day," is "according to the scriptures." The latter phrase, as pointed out earlier, can have the meaning of 'as we learn from the scriptures.' In Romans 16:25-6, Paul (or perhaps a later pseudo-Pauline editor) proclaims his gospel

about Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept in silence for long ages but now revealed, and made known through prophetic writings at the command of God...

Here the words plainly say that Christ is a mystery that has been hidden for a long time, but is now revealed by God through a new reading of scripture, inspired by the Holy Spirit. Thus the recurring statement in the epistles that in these times God has sent the Spirit.

Although it is often pointed out that mainstream Jews of the time drew no doctrine of a sacrificed Messiah from their sacred writings, it does not follow that *no one* did. For Paul's gospel that "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures" we need look no further than Isaiah 53 to see the probable passages Paul is speaking of (trans, by L. Brenton of the Septuagint [LXX]³⁸ passage):

⁴He bears our sins, and is pained for us....⁵But he was wounded on account of our sins, bruised because of our iniquities....⁶All we as sheep have gone astray, everyone has gone astray in his way, and the Lord [delivered him up] ¹²for our sins.... because his soul was delivered up to death...and he bore the sins of many and was delivered because of their iniquities."

Although the writer of Second Isaiah (Isa. 40-55) in this so-called Suffering Servant Song was speaking of a contemporary prophet—perhaps even of himself, though some suggest that this passage is by others, after he suffered death—for early Christians Isaiah 52:13-53:12 was a loaded passage. It became a source for all sorts of theology and information, first about the spiritual Christ, then for the fabricated passion story of the Gospels. Paul hardly needed more than this one passage, saturated with the concept of God delivering up the "Servant" (Greek *pais*, also translatable as child or son), to come up with his gospel of 1 Corinthians 15:3.

The verb in Isaiah 53 for "delivering up" in the context of God doing the delivering is the same as that used in 1 Corinthians 11:23, in Paul's account of the Lord's Supper: "on the night he was delivered up." This may indicate that Paul has formulated his 'myth' of the Lord's Supper under the influence of scripture and perceived revelation; it suggests that his thought in the latter passage should not be seen as having the historical scene of the Gospels in mind, with Judas involved in the 'delivering up' in a scene of betrayal and arrest. As will be seen in Chapter 11 when examining this passage, the implication is that the "delivering" there is also by God.

The rising on the third day in the next part of Paul's gospel (15:4) is more than likely dependent on Hosea 6:2,

After two days he will heal us, on the third day he will restore us.

The story of Jonah also speaks of a rescue from the fish's belly after three days and three nights. As for the manner of Christ's death, the "wounded" of Isaiah 53:5 is sometimes translated "pierced." Psalm 119:120 (in the LXX, No. 118) contains the phrase "penetrate my flesh with thy fear"; the verb in some contexts means "fasten with nails." Psalm 22:16, also heavily mined for Gospel passion details, says "they have pierced my hands and my feet." Zechariah 12:10 (speaking of a person in his own time) links the piercing with a "son":

They shall look on...him whom they have pierced...and shall wail over him as over an only child, and shall grieve for him bitterly as for a first-born son.

The Gospel of John 19:37 calls attention to this verse as a scriptural text which Christ has fulfilled. What lies behind John's statement, however, is that verses like Zechariah 12:10 are the *source* for the 'fact' that Jesus had been crucified. The oft-cited accuracy and proliferation of Jesus' fulfillment of prophecy is not surprising when we consider that all those passages in scripture were used to *create* the story which embodies the fulfillment.

One of the features of scriptural study in this period was the practice of taking individual passages and verses, bits and pieces from here and there, and weaving them into a larger whole. Such a sum was much greater than its parts. This could be one of the procedures used in "midrash," a Jewish method of interpreting and making use of the sacred writings. (There will be much to say about midrash when looking at how the Gospels were constructed.) This bringing together of widely separate scriptural references and deriving meanings

and scenarios from their combination was the secret to creating the early Christian message. Scripture did not contain any full-blown crucified Messiah, but it did contain all the required ingredients. Jewish midrash was the process by which the Christian recipe was put together and baked into the doctrine of the divine Son who had been sacrificed for salvation.

Preaching a Gospel from Scripture

A spiritual, crucified Messiah and Son of God based on readings out of scripture? Some find it hard to believe that this concept could have excited anyone without some relation to an historical event, that it could have been spread across the empire by apostles like Paul unless linked to a flesh and blood person and historical words and deeds.

But how did pagan proselytizers spread the cults of Attis or Mithras, or any of the other savior gods of the mystery religions? *They* had no link to an historical event lying in the background of their mythic story of the god. Philo of Alexandria formulated his "myth" of the universe and its working, salvific parts entirely by applying Platonic philosophy to the Jewish scriptures. He may not have come up with a sacrificial Son, but his concept of an intermediary entity that was the "first-born of God," was a general counterpart, if along more abstract lines, to Paul's dying-for-sin Christ.

Those who have difficulty conceiving of a faith movement not linked to an historical man and his words and deeds are nevertheless confronted with an early record which completely ignores that historical man and his deeds, and fails to attribute any teachings to him. Whereas one can hardly turn a page of the epistles without encountering an appeal to scripture as the basis on which the writer is making his statements. Amid all the philosophical and religious influences operating during the period of incipient Christianity, it is not difficult to envision scriptural investigators constructing their own spiritual savior god from scripture, formulating a "truth" and a "salvation" along Jewish cultural lines.

God's Gospel of the Son

At the very beginning of the collection of New Testament epistles, in the opening verses of Romans, lies a statement which many declare requires us to go no further. Even if Paul were never to breathe another word about Jesus of Nazareth, they say, in verse 3 lies something which unmistakably points to the concept of an historical man in Paul's view of the Christ. And yet, the situation is quite the opposite. This illuminating statement has stood at the head of the Pauline corpus for almost two millennia, and should long since have helped to reveal both the true beginnings of Christianity and the role scripture played in them, as well as the absence of any historical Jesus in Paul's mind.

'Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ²which he promised (or, announced [NEB]) beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, ³the gospel concerning his Son, who... [RSV]

And he goes on to itemize two elements of that gospel about the Son, as will be seen in a moment. But in considering what Paul is saying in these verses, we need to ask: Is there something wrong with this picture?

The gospel is God's gospel, received through revelation. Not from other men, not from Jesus himself through channels of apostolic transmission. This gospel God had promised beforehand, or announced it: both are valid translations of the Greek verb *proepangello*. (The root of this verb is the same as the word for "angel," God's announcer and messenger.) This gospel had been announced in scripture, in the holy writings of the prophets. This is the source of Paul's gospel about the Son. It was all there ahead of time, encoded by God into the writings, awaiting Paul's discovery.

God in scripture had looked ahead—*not to Jesus, but to the gospel that told of him*.

How could Paul present things in this bizarre way? He is telling the Roman Christians that scripture contains the forecast of his apostolic gospel, not the forecast of Jesus and his life. But if God had encoded into scripture information about Jesus that would form part of Paul's gospel, then God would have been first and foremost foretelling Jesus. We would expect Paul to say that God had announced information beforehand about *Jesus*, not about his own gospel.

As Paul presents it, scripture was not the prophecy of Jesus' life and activities. It was the prophecy of the gospel which told of those activities.

In this picture, no life of Jesus has intervened between the writing of scripture and the revelation of the gospel to Paul. Wherever or whenever the activities of the Son had taken place, they were not located in history between the two events.

This is perfectly consistent with the manner of presentation we see throughout the epistles, especially in connection with the revelation of God's "mystery." The secret of Christ has been hidden for long ages, and the first bringing to light of that secret, the first action on God's age-old promises, has taken place not in a life of Jesus in the recent past, but in the inspirations and activities of missionary prophets like Paul. This viewpoint persists as late as the epistle of Titus in the early 2nd century.

We are led to conclude that, in Paul's past, there was no historical Jesus. Rather, the activities of the Son about which God's gospel in scripture told, as interpreted by Paul, had taken place in the spiritual realm and were accessible only by revelation through scripture.

But let's go on. In Romans 1:3-4, following on the last quote above, Paul gives us two items of this gospel about the Son, encoded by God into scripture:

³...who arose from the seed of David according to the flesh (*kata sarka*),

⁴and was designated Son of God in power according to the spirit (*kata pneuma*) of holiness (or, the holy spirit) after his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.

This part of the sentence is frustratingly obscure, as reflected by the many different translations to be found of its various elements. (The above translation of verses 3 and 4 is partly my own, in an attempt to lean toward the literal

Greek.) Here Paul offers two elements about the Son. One is *kata sarka*, literally "according to the flesh," a seemingly vague and particularly cryptic phrase that is used throughout early Christian literature in a variety of ways, often with unclear meaning. The other is *kata pneuma*, literally "according to the spirit." Whether the latter is a reference to the Holy Spirit is also uncertain. Perhaps Paul is using *kata* to refer to something like "in the sphere of the flesh" and "in the sphere of the spirit." This is a suggestion put forward by C. K. Barrett.³⁹ Such a translation is, in fact, quite useful and possibly accurate. Let's look at *kata sarka* first.

...who arose from the seed of David, according to the flesh [or, in the sphere of the flesh]...

Is this a piece of historical information? If so, it is the only one Paul ever gives us, for no other feature of Jesus' human incarnation appears in his letters. But the fact that it is linked with the "according to the spirit" element which, as we shall see, is entirely a heavenly event derived from scripture, suggests that the reference to David's seed is not an earthly, biographical feature Paul is offering.

In fact, it follows, grammatically and conceptually, out of what Paul has just said: it is an element of the gospel about God's Son which has been announced in scripture. Paul has told us clearly and unequivocally that this is where he has obtained this piece of information. In verses 1-2, he has focused on the message to be found in the sacred writings. Why would he suddenly step outside that focus and interject a biographical element about Jesus derived from historical knowledge—then return to scripture for his second element?

Paul did not need to appeal to history here, for scripture was full of predictions that the Messiah would be descended from David. In reading these, Paul would have applied them to his own version of the Messiah, the Christ who was a spiritual entity, not a human one.

Was it possible for the divine Son who operated entirely in the spiritual realm to be "of David's seed," and in a way that was "in the sphere of the flesh"? I suggest that the answer is yes, and that Christ's "arising from David" is a characteristic of Christ *in the spirit world*, a mystical and mythological feature. (Chapter 13 will be devoted to a thorough examination of the use of the term "flesh" [*sarx*] and related language in the epistles.)

But let's continue with the second element of Paul's gospel about the Son in Romans 1:3-4, as derived from scripture:

...and was designated Son of God in power, according to the spirit (or, in the sphere of the spirit), by his resurrection out of the dead.

This is clearly an entirely spiritual event, taking place in heaven after Christ's death and resurrection (themselves spiritual events). And where did Paul get his information about this particular heavenly scene? The quotation above contains two relevant features: Christ's designation as Son of God and the phrase "in power." Where in the sacred writings could Paul have found an important passage which contained those two elements side by side, and which could be regarded as applying to his Messiah?

Psalm 2 is a royal coronation hymn. God is represented as welcoming and anointing his king, and the writer warns the foreign nations to beware of their plots and ambitions. In verses 7-8 God declares, and both Jews and Christians took these words as directed to the Messiah, the Christ:

I will tell of the decree of the Lord:

He said to me, "You are my son, today I have begotten you.

Ask of me, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance,
and the ends of the earth as your possession..." [RSV/NEB]

This passage is the prime candidate for the source of Paul's second gospel element: Jesus is proclaimed God's Son by God himself. And he is invested with power, receiving the nations of the earth as his possession. (The original Psalm writer had Israel herself, through its king, in mind, though the sentiment was no doubt rhetorical.) The theme of Jesus as king runs like a thread throughout the history of Christian tradition, and it certainly was not based on Jesus' recorded life experiences.

The two elements, the one in the sphere of the "flesh" (which will be located in the lowest heavenly sphere, associated with the material world), the other in the sphere of the "spirit" (the highest level of God, to where Jesus ascended after his death), go hand in hand. They are both a part of God's gospel about his Son, relating to the Son's activities in the spiritual realm, found in scripture. Paul is preaching a Jesus entirely derived from the Hebrew bible.

The analysis in this chapter has led to the conclusion that it is the sacred writings which have created the picture of the spiritual Christ and determined many of his features. This will be pursued further in later chapters. To those accustomed to the Gospel picture of a Jesus 'meek and mild,' imparting hope, healing and enlightened teachings in an earthly ministry, it may seem jarring to contemplate that Paul and his contemporaries could feel love and devotion to a figure who was based solely on the interpreted words of a book.

Yet these were the words of God. They told of a hidden realm whose existence was as real as the one men and women moved in every day. Jews believed that everything in this world was mirrored and predestined in Heaven. Angels and spirits filled the layers of the heavens above them. The mystical dimension was real, a place and a state to be yearned for, to achieve through salvation. In the Platonically dominated outlook of the period, scripture was God's window onto that true, perfect reality, the higher realm of the spirit.

Perhaps it was not so strange, then, that Paul and a host of believers could love and commit themselves to a Christ no one had yet seen. Everyone around them was doing the same. Philosophers moved in purely mystical spheres. Isis, Mithras, all the savior gods, they had not come closer to history than the realm of myth. God himself was entirely supernatural. He had never left Heaven or a spiritual state, yet countless generations of Jews had devoted their lives and destinies to him.

Why not to a spiritual Son of God?

The Intermediary Son

Paul may have found God's Son in the sacred writings of Israel, and we have touched on some of the influences which led Paul to look for him there. But two major factors in the environment of the time were influencing people like Paul, and fed into the creation of the spiritual Son and Christ. The first was a philosophical one and forms the subject of this chapter.

Greek Philosophy and the Logos

The spiritual Son was born in a very broad cradle, and it was nowhere near Bethlehem. He was, in fact, the fundamental religious idea of the age, an idea which Christianity synthesized and presented to the future.

Judaism had a long history—though not as long as it believed—of understanding its God as the sole deity, enduring throughout the ages, more or less unchanging. But several centuries before Christianity, Greek thinkers had arrived at their own concept of monotheism. Because they perceived the universe as moving in obedience to a stable law, they postulated a single cosmic mind or governing force behind it. Strands of ideas before Plato became consolidated in Plato, and out of his school came later ideas which, if they did not all go back to the Master himself, were attributed to him and called "Platonism."

This Platonic conception of God was that he was an Absolute Being, a Unity, that he constituted pure mind and inhabited a world of pure spirit. He was not and never could be a part of the imperfect world of matter and the senses, nor could he make any personal contact with it. To humans who inhabited the material, changing world he was inaccessible and incapable of being understood. God was a "transcendent" being, totally separate from the material universe.

By contrast, Stoicism offered an "immanent" God, because God was equivalent to Nature or the world itself, meaning the total universe. The reasoning or governing principle within the universe was thought of as the mind of God, and this the Stoics called the "Logos" (LAW-goss). Humans possessed this reason within themselves (the Stoic "soul") so that they shared in God's nature. They were an integral part of the cosmic world, in continuity with God.

For Stoicism's rival, Platonism, the governing force of the universe (God) was something which lay outside matter. God was the true reality while the visible world was only a distant, imperfect reflection of him. Thus the universe was "dualistic" (in two parts). But it was obvious that such a system by itself was too stark, too unsatisfying. A compromise was necessary, otherwise humanity could have no contact with God at all—something the religious mind will not

countenance. For how was God to be revealed if he possessed no interface with the world of humans? How would humanity benefit from what God had to offer if there were no channel between them? How, indeed, had the world even come about if God was so remote?

Some intermediate force or being had to be postulated. The first task of this intermediary had been creation. In Platonism, the process of creation can be described by saying that the mind of God produced Ideas, and another aspect of this mind, God's creative energy (which Plato called the "Demiurge"), took these Ideas or Forms and fashioned copies of them out of matter, thus producing the material world perceived by the senses. All these elements in the mind of God, his Ideas, the creative forces, were seen as "intermediate" and came collectively to be referred to by the term Logos (literally, "Word").

The Platonic Logos was thus an emanation of God and his point of contact with the world. In addition to being the agent of creation, the Logos revealed God, his nature, the divine will and was the channel of divine aid to the world. The Logos was also the image of God according to which humans were created.

The impulse of the age was to bring the intermediary between God and the world closer to matter, make him more personal, more accessible on a human level. A strong monotheist like Philo—the most prominent philosopher of Hellenistic Judaism⁴⁰—stopped short of making his Son and Logos a personal divine being. Instead, he envisioned Moses as a man into whom the power and qualities of the spiritual Logos had been infused. But other Jews did not feel the same rigid restrictions toward God, and could envision their Son as a personal entity beside God in heaven. From the Logos of Greek and Philonic philosophy to Paul's Christ Jesus was scarcely a stone's throw.

Jewish Personified Wisdom

Hellenistic Jews like Philo and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews adopted Logos ideas to create a melding of Hebrew and Greek. But more mainstream Judaism had its own intermediary figure going back centuries, certainly as old as Plato. For the Jews, God was never quite so inaccessible, but scribes of the period after the Exile presented God as making himself known and working in the world through a part of himself they called "Wisdom."⁴¹

This was no "Son" of God, however, for the figure of Wisdom was female. (The grammatical gender of "wisdom" in Hebrew is feminine.) Wisdom took on a status and personality of her own, developing 'myths' about coming to earth, although there was never any thought of her being physically incarnated.

Here is what the Old Testament Book of Proverbs has to say about the figure of Wisdom:

By the gate, Wisdom calls aloud: "Men, it is to you I call...I am Wisdom, I bestow shrewdness, and show the way to knowledge and prudence...The Lord created me the beginning of his works...when he set the heavens in their place I was there...I was at the Lord's side each day...Happy is the man who keeps to my ways." [8:1-36]

Here are two important aspects of Wisdom. She is "pre-existent," that is, she was with God in Heaven before the creation of the world. And she is associated with God in that work, serving as an instrument in the process of creation:

In wisdom the Lord founded the earth and by understanding he set the heavens in their place. (3:19)

These are two of the primary attributes given to the spiritual Christ in the thought of Paul, pre-existence and a role in creation.

Baruch 3:37 gives us a line which, even though originally intended as a reference to the Torah (the Jewish Law contained in the five biblical books of Moses, which mainstream rabbinic thought identified with Wisdom), may have had a profound influence on the future:

Thereupon wisdom appeared on earth and lived among men.

Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) 24 also has Wisdom taking up her dwelling in Israel. Was this one of the footsteps on the path that eventually brought to earth a different emanation of God—the Son? Perhaps the writer of the hymn to the Logos which was adapted as a Prologue to the final version of the Gospel of John turned it into a song of the incarnation: "So the Logos (Word) became flesh and dwelt among us." (Jn. 1:14)

In the Wisdom of Solomon, perhaps the most important surviving piece of Hellenistic-Jewish writing, we can see a clear and exotic blending of Wisdom with the Logos. This document was almost certainly written in Alexandria, probably in the early 1st century CE. Like the Logos (and under its influence), Wisdom is now the divine power active in the world, the spirit that pervades and governs all things. She, too, is pre-existent and an agent of creation. She is God's "throne-partner," a step away from Christ sitting at the right hand of God.

...she rises from the power of God, a pure effluence of the glory of the Almighty...She is the brightness that streams from everlasting light, the flawless mirror of the active power of God and the image of his goodness...She spans the world in power from end to end, and orders all things benignly. (7:22-30)

The Son as Wisdom and the Logos

The type of thinking in the Wisdom of Solomon pervades the New Testament epistles. Consider the opening verses about the nature of the Son in Hebrews, a document which comes either from Alexandria or from some Palestinian circle with close ties to that city's philosophy.

...the Son who is the effulgence of God's splendor and the stamp of God's very being, who sustains the universe by his word of power.

The hymn in Colossians 1:15-20 is stamped with the same imagery:

He (God's Son) is the image of the invisible God; his is the primacy over all created things. In him everything in heaven and earth was created....And he exists before everything and all things are held together in him.

Paul himself tells us that Christ "is the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24) and "the very image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4). In 1 Corinthians 8:6, he makes Christ the agent of creation, channeling the source of all things that resides in the Father:

For us there is one God, the Father, from whom all being comes...and there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came to be and we through him. [NEB]

Paul and other early Christian writers are speaking of Christ in exactly the same language as we find in the broader philosophical world, both Greek and Jewish. Paul's idea of the spiritual Son has absorbed both the Logos and personified Wisdom. In reading scripture and imagining he is being inspired to a view of God's Son, Paul is drawing on the prominent ideas of his day and the deeper philosophical heritage which lay behind them.

Scholarship fully recognizes this, of course, but its answer is that all these current ideas were *applied* to Jesus, that those who came in contact with him, his apostles and other followers, were so overwhelmed by the force of Jesus' personality, by the things he had said and done, that immediately after his death and perceived resurrection they went out, gathered all this sophisticated mythological theory and heaped it upon the humble Jewish preacher they had followed. (They also must assume that in the process, those followers abandoned all former interest in the details of his life and teachings.)

The inherent fallacy in such a scenario is easy to see. In the above passages, early Christian writers are presenting the Son as "the image of the invisible God," etc. They are describing a divine figure in terms of divine attributes. No identification with a human man is ever made, no writer gives us even a hint that an "application" to an historical Jesus is anywhere in their minds. As suggested earlier, scholars are guilty of reading into the text things they find hard to believe are not there.⁴²

A Channel between God and the World

Paul's Christ, like Wisdom and the Logos, is God's channel in his dealings with the world. Paul has an expression to convey this idea.

In the letters of Paul and those who later wrote in his name, we find the phrase "in Christ Jesus" or "through Christ Jesus" over a hundred times. With Wisdom and the Logos in mind, we can see just what this phrase means.

In Romans 6:11 Paul says this (a literal translation):

Regard yourselves as dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Here Paul is using the idea of "in Christ" to represent a channel of contact with God; Christ is the means by which Christians are "alive" to God. This intermediary channel is a force in the present, something spiritual; it has no reference to a recent historical person or event. At the opening of 1 Corinthians, Paul says that the congregation at Corinth is "dedicated to God in Christ Jesus." Christ is the medium which links the believers of that city with God himself.

Look at Romans 8:39: "Nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Here Christ is the spiritual force which embodies and conveys God's love. Like the Logos, though in a more personal sense, the intermediary Christ allows humanity to reach God and to receive benefits from him.

Titus 3:4-6 tells us:

When the kindness and generosity of God our Savior dawned upon the world...he saved us through the water of rebirth and the renewing power of the Holy Spirit. For he sent down the Spirit upon us plentifully through Jesus Christ. [NEB]

The saving acts which have occurred in the present time are not the events of Jesus' death and resurrection. They are God's granting of the rite of baptism and the bestowing of the Spirit. The heavenly Christ is the channel along which this Spirit has flowed from God to the world.

Christ, then, operates entirely on a spiritual level. He is a communicating and sacramental power now present in the world, impregnating the hearts and minds of believers. These are highly mystical ideas, and there is no justification for scholarship's frequent attempt to see the Pauline phrase "in or through Christ" as a cryptic summary of Jesus' life on earth.

Sending the Spirit of Christ

God's Son is an entity that is only now being revealed to the world, but he is also a Son who has been "sent" into the world. Early Christians saw the spiritual Christ as having arrived in a real way, active and speaking through themselves. When Paul and other writers speak of the "Spirit" sent from God, they are usually referring to the traditional idea of the Holy Spirit, the power and presence of God acting within inspired teachers and apostles. Yet on occasion we see a more explicit identification of this Spirit with Christ himself (as in Philippians 1:19), so that Christ becomes a spirit force in his own right.

"God has sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts," says Galatians 4:6. 1 John 5:20 reads: "We know that the Son of God has come (literally, *"is come"*—in the present tense) and given us understanding to know him who is real." The Son is working among Christians at the present time, imparting knowledge of God.

Thus we can understand the "coming" in Ephesians 2:17: "And coming, he (Christ) announced the good news..." For what was the content of that news?

...peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near, for through him we both alike have access in one spirit to the Father.

Instead of taking the opportunity to refer to some of Jesus' earthly teachings, the writer quotes Isaiah 57:19, which speaks of an End-time reconciliation between peoples. Even the preliminary words about preaching good news are based on Isaiah 52:7. This is the Christ who has "come" in the spirit and speaks to the world—a "speaking" found in scripture. The final phrase of the quote identifies him as a spiritual channel to the Father.

In the same way, a passage in Hebrews often cited as an indicator of an historical Jesus (5:7) offers us 'activities' which Christ performed "in the days of his flesh." Once again such activities are derived from scripture. (This passage will be part of a detailed examination of Hebrews in chapter 16.) At every turn in the epistles we meet a Son and Christ who has taken shape in the minds of the early Christians under the influence of the Jewish sacred writings.

A Christ Who Inhabits the World of Scripture

This has led to an important insight into how the early Christians viewed Christ. Not only is the Son revealed in scripture, the Son *speaks* from scripture. Certain passages in the sacred writings were regarded as the voice of the Son, speaking directly to the world.

This is most evident in the Epistle to the Hebrews. It begins with the statement (1:2) that "in this final age (God) has spoken to us through the Son." This, however, would seem to be something other than the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, for not a single Gospel saying is offered through 13 chapters, not even a reference to the fact that Jesus had taught in an earthly ministry. Instead, when 'quoting' the voice of the Son to make his arguments, the author draws on passages from scripture that are identified as the Son's own words.

When illustrating (2:12) that the Son considers believers to be his brothers, he offers Psalm 22:22, "I will proclaim thy name to my brothers." More than one scholar has sought to explain why the writer would not have drawn on such sayings as are found in the Gospels, as in Mark 3:35: "Whoever does the will of God is my brother."⁴³

In many cases, such scriptural 'sayings' are prefaced by a "he says"—in the present tense—showing that in the writer's mind, the Son is an entity who is known and communicates now and today, speaking through the sacred writings, not through any past preaching career on earth.

As late as the end of the century, the same phenomenon can be detected in the epistle 1 Clement. In chapter 22 'Clement' says:

All these promises find their confirmation when we believe in Christ, for it is he himself who summons us through the Holy Spirit, with the words: "Come, children, listen to me, and I will teach you the fear of the Lord."

Clement regards this quote from Psalm 34 as a personal summons from Christ, as though telling Christian readers that he will teach them the fear of the Lord. When earlier (16:15-16) he describes Christ's sufferings, he quotes a passage from Psalm 22, again presenting it as the voice of Christ himself, telling of his experiences of suffering and rejection through the words of scripture.

In early Christian thought Christ was a spiritual figure, a present force who was accessible through the sacred writings. *Scripture was not the prophecy of the Christ event, but its embodiment.* The Son inhabited the spiritual world of the scriptures, God's window onto the unseen true reality. To that unseen, mythical world we will now travel.

Part Four

A WORLD OF MYTH AND SAVIOR GODS

10

Who Crucified Jesus?

The pieces of the Jesus Puzzle in Part Three demonstrated how the New Testament epistles present Christ as a spiritual force active in the present time, functioning as a channel between God and humanity. But there is another, more important role being given to him, for in some unspecified time and place, Paul's Christ had performed a redemptive act. The saving benefits of that act are only now being revealed and made available.

In the epistles, Christ's act of salvation is not located in the present, or even in the recent past, and certainly not within the historical setting familiar to us from the Gospels. Christ had existed from before time began, and it was in a non-historical time and place, in a supernatural realm, that this Son of God had undergone a redeeming "blood" sacrifice.

To understand that setting, we need to look at the ancients' views of the universe and the various concepts of myth among both Jews and pagans, including the features of the Hellenistic salvation cults known as the "mysteries." In the latter, a multitude of savior gods functioned much like Jesus and offered similar guarantees of happy afterlives and immortality.

Spiritual and Material Worlds

In chapter 3, we dipped our feet into Platonic waters and saw how the universe was perceived as "dualistic," split into two main divisions of higher and lower, spiritual and material worlds. The upper world was the realm of God and supernatural forces, containing perfect and timeless realities; the lower world was the realm of matter and humanity where things were changing and perishable, imperfect copies of those higher, genuine realities. This was pure Platonism. But the more popular view, a melting pot of more than one line of thought and many cultural and religious backgrounds, was a little less pristine and a lot more chaotic.

When the eye of many an ancient philosopher or even the average layperson looked skyward, it imagined it could see a populated spirit world where the bulk of the workings of the universe took place. Near the bottom of this multi-level

system lay humanity's sphere, the material earth; only Sheol or Hades, the underworld, was lower. (The occasional document places the 'underworld' in a sphere of the heavens.) Various supernatural layers—usually seven, controlled by the seven astronomical bodies: the moon, Mercury, Venus, the sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, though details of the order could vary—extended upwards. They were filled with spiritual life forms, reaching to the highest heaven of pure spirit where the ultimate God dwelled in timeless perfection, usually regarded as a sphere of its own above all else. The nature of this dualistic reality involved far-reaching parallels between the higher and lower realms, between spirit and matter, between the heavenly paradigm and its earthly expressions.

Even before Plato, near-eastern mythology envisioned primal or archetypal forms existing in heaven, of which material things were counterparts. A sacred site such as the Jerusalem Temple was the earthly counterpart of a greater, more perfect heavenly Temple. Nations, rulers, groups on earth possessed a corresponding angelic or divine being who represented them, a superior counterpart in heaven, a champion. Evil nations were guided by evil angels. That counterpart in heaven embodied the qualities which the people he represented claimed for themselves, or looked forward to achieving when the time of salvation arrived. Events expected to take place on earth had already been worked out in some fashion in archetypal processes in the heavenly realm, or in the mind of God. Figures to be revealed in the future already existed and were preparing themselves in heaven.

Paul and the earliest Christians thus lived at a time when the world of matter was viewed as only one dimension of reality, the observable half of a larger, integrated whole. The other—invisible—half was regarded as the "genuine" reality, accessible to the intellect or through revelation. It was characteristic of mythological thinking that the heavenly counterpart was more real and permanent than the earthly one, and prior to it in order of being. (See, for example, John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, p. 150.) Such an outlook must be taken into account in any interpretation of the earliest Christian writings.

The Mythical World

When a culture is dominated by the sense that the world it inhabits is an outpost or antechamber of a more important world, a visible dimension beside or below a vast invisible dimension, it must envision a relationship as well as links between the two.

Myths represent the other end of the channel flowing between the spiritual world and the human one, by which the latter is sustained and vitalized, given meaning and purpose. Before Platonism, myths were generally set in a dim, distant past. This was, and continues to be, the approach of all pre-scientific societies around the world. And although by the period of early Christianity mythical thinking was being increasingly influenced and reinterpreted by Platonic higher-lower world cosmology, this long tradition of primordial myth continued to flow as an undercurrent.

It is important at the outset to provide some nuance to the use of the word "myth." Popular usage of the term encompasses everything from legendary events in distant real or imagined history, such as in the Greek case the Trojan War or the exploits of Heracles, to what could be called "religious mythology," entailing the actions of deities which have established the way the world currently works, from creation to social practices to processes of salvation. Lines between the two can sometimes be blurred, and gods are usually involved in most of it in one way or another. In biblical tradition, the story of Eden and the Fall would be included in the religious category, while Noah and the Flood, or the story of the Hebrews' sojourn and exodus from Egypt might more naturally fall into the legendary category, with of course some overlap, as religious and cultural rituals and traditions can grow out of both. For our purposes, it is the religious category which is the more significant.

Anthropologists of religion such as Mircea Eliade⁴⁴ call the distant time of myth the "sacred past." This was a primordial time at the beginning of things when supernatural beings created the world and first performed acts and established institutions which set the patterns of behavior and belief that society now follows. Primordial time has established the model, the *paradigm*; present society embodies its copy, its repetition. Human beings have always needed to justify their beliefs and practices, even their sufferings, to place them on a level greater than themselves. They do this by anchoring them in a divine precedent in a time and setting which bestows on them a venerable authority, by attaching themselves to a perceived force or entity beyond their own world. This explains the fundamental appeal of religion: through myth the individual is invested with significance; he or she is rendered sacred by acknowledging a divine ancestry and entering into a new state of being—a rebirth into union with the supernatural paradigm. Though specifics differed, both Jewish and pagan cultures followed this universal instinct.

A suitable past, therefore, has to be created, as do links with that past. This is the purpose of rituals and sacraments, essential companion pieces to myth. By performing a rite which "re-creates" the primordial event, society keeps it alive, makes it recur for itself. The vitality and benefits which the divine act had originally generated are regenerated in the present. Those participating in the rite can draw on that regenerated power. Primordial time, in the language of the anthropologists, is made into an "eternal now," always accessible and repeatable. An example is the Christian sacrament of the Eucharist. By staging the rite in the celebration of the Mass, the priest draws Christ into the proceedings, embodied in the priest's reenactment of Christ's original act. That act is kept alive, its benefits are made continually available to the devotees.

By the 1st century CE ancient views of religious myth had been considerably affected by Platonic philosophy. Even though processes continued to operate in a similar fashion, the time and place of mythical happenings had, in the minds of philosophers at least, been shifted from the distant primordial past to a higher world of spiritual realities. Instead of looking back to archaic beginnings,

religious ritual could reach into that parallel, upper dimension and find its paradigms, its spiritual forces, right there. One purpose of this book is to demonstrate the derivation of Christian mythology from the thinking of the time, how it was interwoven with the religious expressions of its age. An essential aspect of that thinking involved not simply the philosophy and cosmology of Platonism, but the latter's presence and role in important aspects of prevalent salvation theory, both Jewish and pagan. The more we can perceive in common between Christianity and the various mythologies of its time, Jewish, Gnostic, Hermetic and Heavenly Man, and especially the so-called "dying and rising gods" of the mystery cults, the closer we will get to understanding the essential dimensions of early Christian belief and the nature of the early Christian Christ.

The Nature of the Mystery Cult Myths

The exact interpretations of the mystery cult myths during the period when Christianity was developing, the stories of gods like Osiris, Attis, Mithras, Dionysos whose acts provided personal salvation to their devotees (to be looked at in detail in the next chapter), are hard to pin down. We possess virtually no writings about the mysteries which explain the meaning of the myths themselves, since this was forbidden; certainly none from the average believer or apostle of the cults. What we have are a few writings by philosophers who seek to impose an allegorical interpretation on the myths. Plutarch is the most notable, virtually the only one from the turn of the era period, which is why we rely so much on his *Isis and Osiris* with its discussion of the myths of the Egyptian savior deities. Other hints and deductions which can be derived from archeological remains, such as the Mithraic monuments, can also be informative.

Plutarch, as we shall see, provides indications that Platonic-type renderings of the Osiris myth envisioned a heavenly location for it. But such myths, for the most part, had begun as *primordial* myths, stories set in a distant or primeval time on earth. In that form they had the weight of centuries behind them, and when Platonism became dominant they were not likely to undergo an immediate and universal recasting into a new heavenly context; nor would everyone, from philosopher to devotee-in-the-street, shift to understanding and talking about their myths in such a revised setting. The changeover in the mind of the average person may well have been imperfect, just as modern science has effected a rethinking of past literal and naive views toward elements of the bible in the direction of the spiritual and symbolic, but in an incomplete and varied fashion across our religious culture as a whole.

What we do know is that the philosophers whose writings have come down to us did in fact transplant the myths and it was under the influence of Platonism. They transplanted them from a primordial time to a supernatural dimension, turning them into allegories of cosmic forces and spiritual processes. For them, the religious myths now symbolized things that happened beyond earth. And if that transplanting is the trend to be seen in the surviving writings on the subject, it is very likely that a similar process took place to some degree in the broader

world of the devotee and officiant of the mysteries; it cannot be dismissed simply as an isolated elitist phenomenon. In fact, that very cosmological shift of setting can be seen in many of the Jewish intertestamental writings, presenting divine figures and salvific forces operating in the spiritual realm of the heavens, as in the Similitudes of Enoch, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Ascension of Isaiah and other writings to be examined; in the New Testament itself, the Epistle to the Hebrews presents a spiritual sacrifice by Christ in a heavenly sanctuary.

This general shift to a vertical salvation process between heaven and earth from the older horizontal one between primordial past and present, a shift from a mythical time on earth to a mythical, spiritual world beyond the earth, needs to be applied as an interpretive tool to the early Christian record, especially given that this record has nothing to say about a life and death of Christ in an historical earthly setting. This is not to say that such an interpretation of Christian myth is *dependent* on establishing the same thing in regard to the mystery cults. Rather, the latter will provide corroboration and a wider context in which to understand and set the conclusions which can be drawn from the early Christian writings themselves. It is that early Christian record which reveals the nature of the original Christian belief in a heavenly Christ.

Christian Myth

The essential element of *The Jesus Puzzle* interpretation of early cultic Christ belief, and the one which has proven the most difficult for the modern mind to comprehend and accept, is that Paul's Christ Jesus was an entirely supernatural figure, crucified in the lower heavens at the hands of the demon spirits. For Paul and his contemporaries, the suffering and death which Christ underwent and the available benefits now flowing from them are referred to as God's secrets. They are the "mysteries" of this higher sphere taking place before or outside time. Such mysteries have been revealed by God through scripture and the Holy Spirit.

This Christian myth was to a great extent qualified by its Jewish heritage. Whatever the primitive Hebrew view of a "sacred past" may have been in the prehistoric period, it eventually moved into a more concrete setting. Primordial figures and processes became part of an archaic history, embodied in legends of human ancestors and patriarchs who had enjoyed special contacts with the Deity. All of it became firmly anchored in an historical past which could be chronicled year by year. Neither Abraham nor Moses—who may or may not be based on actual historical figures—were located in a true sacred past or higher reality. The promises their God made to them, the precedents they set (such as the practice of circumcision) were pinpointed in historical time. This heritage fed into Christian mythology and modified the type of thinking the early Christ cult had absorbed from the conceptual world of the pagan.

Thus where the Greek myths were rendered essentially timeless, unrelated to a chronicled past, the myth of Christ had features derived from Jewish scripture. Scripture presented an ongoing system of salvation history, and the redemptive actions of Christ in the spiritual world had to be fitted into this ongoing pattern.

For example, while the Christ of the epistles is never placed at any specific point in history, he is in certain ways presented as 'following' Adam and Abraham and David; the effects of his sacrifice are subsequent to the old Law and Temple cult, supplanting them. The impression of 'sequence within history' is thus created. Scriptural prophecies previously interpreted as applying to a human Messiah now had to be redirected toward the new heavenly Messiah. He had to be "of David's stock" (Romans 1:3), since the clear testimony in scripture that the Messiah would be a descendant of David could neither be ignored nor abandoned, even if it had to be seen in a different light. He was thus, as we shall see, viewed as possessing a Davidic or Judaic nature.

Even some of the Hellenistic savior gods could be said to possess an ethnic lineage, as being associated with the societies which gave rise to them; it would not have been unusual to style Osiris as "Egyptian" or Mithras as "Persian," especially if their original myths went back to a time and format when such figures *were* regarded as members of those ethnic groups (such as Osiris as an ancient king of Egypt). As an expression of the new covenant, Christ could have been seen as operating under the old Jewish Law with the purpose of abrogating it. The historicity and human characteristics of scripture rubbed off on the picture of Christ presented by early Christian writers, such as the declaration that he was "born of woman" in Galatians 4:4 (although we shall also consider the question of its authenticity to Paul), under the influence of Isaiah 7:14. All this made the evolution of the spiritual Christ into an historical figure much easier.

Rites, Sacraments and Paradigms

Just as today we perceive natural laws and forces working in nature and the universe, the ancients perceived spiritual forces operating between the natural world and the supernatural world, between the present earthly reality and the primordial past or higher divine reality. For Paul, the rite of baptism was a sacrament in this sense, something which drew on invisible spiritual forces operating between past and present, between heaven and earth. Baptism linked the Christian initiates with Christ in the spiritual realm. It made them part of a collective, mystical body: Christ as the Head, believers the limbs and organs (see 1 Cor. 6:15, Eph. 5:30, Col. 1:18). It also linked them with Christ's mythical act of death and resurrection, conferring a new birth upon them. Paul calls this effect "dying and rising to Christ." Drawing on the spiritual forces generated by Christ's redemptive act, the believer dies to his or her old life in sin and rises to a new one free of sin; and he or she inherits the promise of future resurrection. Such sacramental thinking was not derived from Judaism, but from Hellenistic religious thought, as expressed in the mysteries,⁴⁵ although Paul no doubt refined it in his own direction.

In describing the relationship between the upper and lower worlds, scholars (e.g., Collins, *op.cit.*, p. 150) speak of a "parallelism of action" between heavenly and earthly counterparts, a "structural homologue" (quoting a phrase used by G. Theissen, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*, p. 121). Actions by divine

beings in the spiritual realm have their consequences for those on earth who are joined to them. This idea is the key to understanding the concept of salvation which early Christianity shared with the Hellenistic cults. The absorption of the spiritual power generated by the deity and his acts is accomplished through a pattern of parallel "likeness." Here is the way Paul puts it in Romans 6:5:

For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection. [NASB]

In other words, the spiritual force set up by the acts of the deity in the primordial past or higher reality impacts on the devotee in the present in a parallel process. Death creates a "death," resurrection creates a "resurrection." Whether in the primordial or higher world setting, the spiritual model, the paradigm, sets the pattern for the earthly copies. Christ's act of resurrection guarantees the resurrection of the convert who undergoes baptism; the rite is the means of harnessing that available spiritual force and making it flow to the believer. (My preferred term for this process is "paradigmatic parallelism.")

The concept of a paradigm figure in heaven who determines the fate of his counterparts on earth can be illustrated by examples from Jewish apocalyptic. As noted in chapter 5, Daniel 7:13-14 introduces a vision of the "one like a son of man," a heavenly figure who is brought before the throne of God following the overthrow of the last of earth's great empires. This figure receives power and dominion from God, an act which signifies (so an angel informs Daniel) that the righteous elect of Israel, the "Saints of the Most High," shall receive such a sovereignty over the earth. Some regard this "one like a son of man" as an angel, others simply as a poetic image of the saints he represents. Still others suggest he is a supernatural figure who serves as a heavenly representative for the saints on earth. Here the issue need not be resolved. Whatever the writer had in mind, Daniel's figure serves as an example of the divine paradigm who undergoes an experience in heaven which guarantees a corresponding experience on earth by his human counterpart.

In the *Similitudes of Enoch* (1 Enoch 37-71), as seen in chapter 8, the figure called the Elect One or Righteous One—he is also referred to as Son of Man and Messiah—is revealed to be waiting in heaven. Soon he shall appear on earth to render judgment, he will raise the oppressed and overthrow the wicked rulers and those who reject the Most High (God). He is the champion of a group on earth, the suffering righteous and elect. In the Elect One dwells those qualities, holiness and righteousness, shared by his earthly counterparts. They await the changes he will bring, including their own glorification and reception of eternal life. However, this Righteous One (a 'spiritual Messiah' idea among Jews!) is not a sacrificial figure; the Enochian sect had not evolved in that direction.

But whoever wrote the christological hymn quoted by Paul in *Philippians* 2:6-11 has done just that. Here we have a divine being who "shared in God's very nature," who humbled himself and in obedience accepted death. As a result, "God raised him to the heights," where he received the homage of all powers and beings on earth and in heaven. The implication is that this self-sacrificing

divinity (who operates in the celestial spheres, not on earth) is a paradigm for believers on earth, who will similarly be exalted as a consequence of their own obedience and death. As Morna Hooker puts it ("Philippians 2:6-11" in *Jesus und Paulus*, p. 151f):

Christ becomes what we are (likeness of flesh, suffering and death), so enabling us to become what he is (exalted to the heights).

All this fits into that most fundamental of ancient concepts outlined earlier: the idea that earth was the mirror image of heaven, the product proceeding from the archetype, the visible material counterpart to the genuine spiritual reality above. Heavenly events determined earthly realities. It follows that in such a philosophical system, the determining acts of divine forces which conferred salvation would of necessity be located not on earth but in that higher realm. Everything Paul says places him in that sort of thought world.

The Rulers of This Age

Who does Paul identify as having slain Christ? That one reference to a human agency, namely "the Jews" in 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16, has been rejected by a good part of modern scholarship as an interpolation (see Appendix 1). For Paul's true outlook, consider 1 Corinthians 2:6-8:

⁶And yet I do speak of a wisdom for those who are mature, not a wisdom of this passing age, nor of the rulers of this age who are passing away. ⁷I speak of God's secret wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and predestined by God for our glory before time began. ⁸None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory, [my trans.]

A great amount of scholarly ink has been spilled over the meaning of "the rulers of this age" (*ton archonton tou aionos toutou* in verses 6 and 8). In both pagan and Jewish parlance, the word *archontes* could be used to refer to earthly rulers and those in authority (as in Romans 13:3). But it is also, along with several others like it, a technical term for the spirit forces, the "powers and authorities" who rule the lowest level of the heavenly world and who exercise authority over the events and fate (usually cruel) of the earth, its nations and individuals. That invisible powers, mostly evil, were at work behind earthly phenomena was a widely held belief in Hellenistic times, including among Jews, and it was shared by Christianity.

There has not been a universal scholarly consensus on what Paul has in mind in 1 Corinthians 2:6 and 8, but many commentators⁴⁶ over the last century, some reluctantly, have decided that he is referring to the demon spirits. The term *aidn*, age (or sometimes in the plural, "ages"), was in a religious and apocalyptic context a reference to the present age of the world, in the sense of all recorded history. The next or "coming" age was the one due to follow the awaited Day of the Lord, when God's kingdom would be established. One of the governing ideas of the period was that the world to the present point had been under the

control of the evil angels and spirit powers, and that the coming of the new age would see their long awaited overthrow.

Humanity was engaged in a war against the demons, and one of the strongest appeals of the Greek salvation cults was their promise of divine aid in this war, on a personal level. Thus, "rulers of this age" should not be seen as referring to the current secular authorities who happen to be in power in present political circumstances. Indeed, the rather sweeping character of the phrase is at odds with a view that all Paul was referring to was the Roman procurator Pontius Pilate and possibly the Jewish High Priest Caiaphas as responsible for Jesus' crucifixion. They could hardly be styled "the rulers of this age." Rather, Paul envisions that those in the present age who have controlled the earth and separated it from Heaven, the evil angelic powers, are approaching their time of "passing away" (2:6) and that they did not understand God's purposes, namely their own destruction, when they inadvertently crucified "the Lord of glory."

Ephesians 3:9-10 echoes these hidden purposes of God, and declares that they have now been brought to light:

...the application of this mystery which has been hidden for long ages in God the creator of the universe, so that through the church the wisdom of God might be made known to the rulers [*archais*] and authorities in the heavens, in accordance with his eternal purpose which he carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord." [my trans.]

Here the rulers (using *arche*, a variant of *archon*) are identified as the ones in the heavens. This writer is consistent with general Pauline expression in allotting the task of revealing God's long-hidden mystery to the "church," to men like himself, not to any recent historical Jesus. The last phrase of the quote refers to the workings of Christ in the higher spiritual world, his redeeming actions within God's eternal realm and time. In other words, the world of myth.

A prominent early Christian idea was that Christ by his death had subjected all the spirit powers and authorities, both good and evil, to his control. In this light, Colossians 2:15 again places Jesus' crucifixion in a supernatural milieu, for it is difficult to see any historical scene on Calvary contained in this idea:

On the cross he discarded the cosmic powers and authorities like a garment; he made a public spectacle of them and led them as captives in his triumphal procession. (NEB)

Ephesians 6:12 also speaks of the fight which is not against human foes, but against the "cosmic powers, authorities and potentates of this dark world, the superhuman forces of evil in the heavens." These were thought of as having political organizations like rulers on earth. They were well placed and capable of executing a spiritual Christ who had descended from the higher divine realm into their territory, and we will look later at a document which paints such a picture of the Son descending from Heaven to be crucified by the evil angels.

S. G. F. Brandon (*History, Time and Deity*, p. 167) is one scholar who faces unflinchingly the conclusion that though Paul's statement "may seem on cursory

reading to refer to the Crucifixion as an historical event...the expression 'rulers of this age' does not mean the Roman and Jewish authorities. Instead, it denotes the daemonic powers who were believed to inhabit the planets [the celestial spheres] and control the destinies of men...Paul attributes the Crucifixion not to Pontius Pilate and the Jewish leaders, but to these planetary powers."

However, Brandon (like everyone else) fails to address the question of how Paul could have spoken in such terms if he knew the tradition of Jesus' death in Judea, providing no qualification to this supernatural picture. The suggestion that since earthly rulers are considered to be controlled by heavenly ones the latter are seen as operating "through" the former is simply reading the idea into the text. By the time we get to the Gospel picture which first makes a clear reference to earthly rulers in the death of Jesus, the heavenly dimension which supposedly lies behind them disappears, or in the case of John retires into the distant allusive background. John, incidentally, regularly refers to Satan as "the prince/ruler [*archon*] of this world," which is the singular form of Paul's plural "rulers."

Moreover, we have noted that any role for earthly rulers in the crucifixion of Jesus would have influenced Paul's thinking about their character. He could never have said, as he does in Romans 13:3-4, that "Rulers [here using *archontes* in its human meaning] hold no terrors for them who do right...(the ruler) is the minister of God for your own good....He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer." The Gospel picture would have contradicted the spirit of this statement and created the implication that Jesus was a wrongdoer. Paul's words imply that he knew nothing of Pilate or other earthly rulers having had a hand in the death of his Christ Jesus.

Ancient Views of "Rulers of this Age"

One of the reasons why many modern critical scholars have been willing to allow that Paul means the demon spirits in 1 Corinthians 2:8 is because that was the dominant understanding of Christian writers in the early centuries. Ignatius, in his epistle to the Smyrneans, says in 6:1,

Even things in heaven and the glory of the angels, and the rulers [*archontes*] visible and invisible, even for them there is a judgment if they do not believe on the blood of Christ.

Robert M. Grant (*Gnosticism and Early Christianity*, p.176) compares Paul with the Gospel of John, noting: "In Paul's mind Satan was the archon of this age; but for John he has become the archon of this *world*" Paul's focus is on the larger cosmos where the archons operate, embracing spiritual realms; it is they who are the rulers of this age, and it is on this cosmic scene where the mythical Christ himself operates. In the Gospels, the focus has been reduced to the world of humans, now seen as Satan's theater of operations. Christ, with the advent of the Gospels, is now on earth, and the focus shifts to that perspective.

Origen is another who interprets "rulers of this age" in 1 Corinthians 2:8 as referring to evil spirits. In his *De Principiis*⁴¹ he first (Bk. I, ch. 5) addresses the references in the Paulines to the evil angelic powers in the heavens, expressing

uncertainty as to how to identify them. He understands that the terminology he is discussing relates to the demon world, but he seems to want to make room for an alternate understanding which can encompass human figures—understandable in view of his belief in the Gospels—even though Ephesians 6:12 is absolutely clear that its author is speaking entirely of spirit forces ("our struggle is not against flesh and blood"). Later in the same work, he gets down to discussing Paul's words more specifically:

And the Apostle Paul...says that the Savior even was crucified by the princes of this world, who shall come to naught, whose wisdom also he does not speak [1 Cor. 2:6-8]. By all this, therefore, holy scripture teaches us that there are certain invisible enemies that fight against us, and against whom it commands us to arm ourselves. [Bk. III, ch. 2]

Thus, Origen is interpreting Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:6-8 in the context of the demon forces, humanity's "invisible enemies"; these heavenly powers are said to have introduced "false knowledge" into the minds of men and (human) princes of the earth. He then enumerates the "princes" who "in the holy scriptures" are said to be over individual nations, such as Persia and Greece and Tyre; these, he notes, "are not human beings, but certain (heavenly) powers."

He goes on to say that these very princes—the ones not to be seen as human beings—banded together to destroy the Lord and Savior. On the other hand, his quotation of Psalm 2:2, "the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers assembled together, against the Lord and His Christ," perhaps implies that they were earthly, although taken literally, this would hardly conform to the Gospel event, which was far from involving the human princes of Persia, Greece or Tyre. Origen makes no attempt to resolve these vacillations and contradictions and concludes rather lamely that the snares of these princes were discovered when they crucified the Lord of glory, as stated by Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:6-8.

It would seem that Origen is trying to resolve or wed the two contrary outlooks, first being led to deal with Paul's words in the obvious context in which they belonged, but at the same time seeking to position the demons one step removed by presenting them as introducing the false 'wisdom of the world' into earthly princes' minds.

We thus see Origen struggling to present the demons as working *through* the earthly princes of this world to crucify Christ. He never definitively states that this is what Paul means, and in fact he is hard pressed to draw even such an *implication* from Paul. But one thing is clear: Origen is acknowledging that Paul's phrase, "the rulers of this age," is a direct reference to the demons, not to earthly rulers. In this he must be correct, since such a view is not likely to have arisen post-Paul and post-Gospels if it did not in fact exist in Paul's time and mind. Nevertheless, Origen has taken it upon himself to try to explain that those demons crucified Christ by manipulating the earthly princes through their wiles of false wisdom. The other telling point to be made here is that Paul himself is oblivious to such a necessity. He never feels compelled to explain what Origen is bending over backwards to do: how did the demons effect their crucifixion of the

Lord of glory if he was crucified on earth? Indeed, he shows no sign of any such difficulty, no sense of what should have been a natural question in his readers' minds: if the Roman governor Pontius Pilate condemned Jesus to the cross on the mount of Calvary at the instigation of the Jewish religious leaders, how could the demons be declared to be responsible? If Origen felt a compelling necessity to elucidate this problem, why didn't Paul? That necessity, of course, continues to this day, with scholarship generally following Origen's lead.

Before him, Tertullian had a different view of Paul's meaning. He challenged the Gnostic Marcion, (*Against Marcion*, Bk. V, ch. 6), who evidently maintained that Paul's "rulers of this age" were the evil-spirit minions of the Creator god (that is, Yahweh, the god of the Jewish Bible, who for Gnostics was not the ultimate High God but a tyrannical subordinate deity). Tertullian countered—which would be in contradiction to Origen—that Paul's "princes of this world" were meant as nothing but earthly; the apostle had been referring to Herod and Pilate. Tertullian arrived at this conclusion because the Gospels made it clear that the demon forces whom Jesus challenged during his ministry knew who he was. Therefore, had they crucified him it would have been with full knowledge of his identity, whereas earthly rulers could be said not to have recognized that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God. Such reasoning gave him Paul's meaning.

It is very telling that Tertullian shows no sign of Origen's and the common modern-day explanation: that Paul, while his phrase may have meant the demon spirits, saw them as working through earthly rulers. This would indicate that no such understanding as that of Origen existed in Tertullian's day or prior to it, and thus Paul was unlikely to have had such a thing in mind. Nor can it be claimed that Paul had failed to offer such an explanation on the grounds that it was understood by his readers already; if there was such a prevalent understanding it should have survived to be used by Tertullian.

In view of the latter's tactic in insisting on the "princes of this world" having been earthly rulers, and his claim that this was Paul's meaning, we can safely assume that Marcion believed otherwise. The text of Tertullian's passage here is notably opaque as to what Marcion's position was (Marcion's own writings do not survive, and we have no independent recording of his view of the matter). But it must have been that Paul's "rulers of this age" did not refer to earthly princes, since the latter is what Tertullian insists on as a counter-position. This, then, gives us another 'witness'—a very early one before the mid 2nd century, the earliest we can point to—of an understanding of 1 Corinthians 2:6-8 as a reference to the demon spirits. How Marcion integrated this view into his version of the Gospel Jesus as an historical figure of sorts, an entity who had come to earth as an adult but only in a 'seeming' material form, we do not know. But we can assume he did not employ Origen's explanation that the demons worked through earthly princes to crucify Jesus. If he had, Tertullian would have dealt with the question on those grounds.

Certain Gnostic writings which have survived show the same interpretation of Paul's "rulers of this age" as Marcion evidently held. One of the recently

unearthed gnostic documents is *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, a treatise demonstrating the reality (*hypostasis*) of these evil beings. It opens by noting (pseudo-) Paul's views on the "authorities of the universe and the spirits of wickedness" in Colossians and Ephesians. Just as Paul himself had suggested in 1 Corinthians 2:8, these "rulers" are said to be ignorant; they think that there is no power above them. In 87,²⁵ the *archontes* "laid plans and said, 'Come, let us create a man that will be soil from the earth'," taking on the role of creation which is a feature of many gnostic systems. There is in this document no death of a Jesus figure, but considering that the roots of Gnosticism go back before the establishment of an historical Jesus in the Gospels, we are once again witnessing an understanding of archontic rulers as spirit demons unassociated with any earthly princes, and thus a pointer to the older understanding in the time of Paul.

The Where of Christ's Death

Greek thought from Plato on envisioned "daemons" in the heavens as divine intermediaries, though not necessarily evil ones. But by the time we get to the turn of the era, gentiles as well as Jews had a widespread belief in the malevolent activity of demons. However, the myths of the Hellenistic savior gods did not involve evil spirits in the stories of their deaths (such myths generally preceded the development of such spirits); consequently, we are not going to find Pauline-like demonic parallels in Greek salvation mythology. We must turn largely to Jewish writings. While there is virtually nothing about evil spirits in the Old Testament, they come into their own with the apocryphal and pseudepigraphic writings, chiefly in the documents of sectarian groups.

The intertestamental period witnessed a fixation on these evil spirits, in which one theory and another saw them as forces which needed redeeming, overcoming or simply destroying, something that God had promised. The fallen "Watchers" in 1 Enoch, for their sin of bringing death and evil into the world, would be condemned to be imprisoned within the earth for eternity (ch.14) or in a "terrible place" which is neither heaven nor earth (ch.21). The 1st century Testament of Solomon presents that legendary Hebrew king as a savior figure who establishes control over the demons, providing the reader with magical ways to counter their effects. Thus by Paul's time they have become vast powers that infest the heavens, wreaking havoc on the lives of humans. And they are very much involved in—that is, interfering with—the processes of salvation.

If Paul and others regarded the demon spirits as the direct agents of Christ's death, where may that death have been seen as taking place? Nowhere in the 1st century epistles (setting aside 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16 as a commonly regarded interpolation) are any historical agents designated as the killers of Christ, and nowhere is a time and place of his death ever stated—despite the fixation which the epistle writers have on that death. This in itself would be a virtually impossible state of affairs had it happened as the Gospels recount. What is the alternative? Either it was seen as taking place on earth at some unknown time in a more distant past, or as taking place in a dimension beyond earth.

The former theory has been held by G. A. Wells, the foremost proponent of the mythical Jesus theory in the latter 20th century,⁴⁹ and many on the Internet scene today who are sympathetic to Jesus mythicism subscribe to it. They are persuaded to this position on the basis of certain passages we are in the process of examining, such as "of David's stock" (Romans 1:3) and "born of woman" (Galatians 4:4), or references to Jesus' "flesh" and "blood." It is maintained that such terminology can only have applied to a human man, and that if the epistle writers seem to know nothing about a recent Jesus of Nazareth, they must have regarded their Jesus as having lived on earth at some unknown time in the past.

Two things argue against this position. One is that those references fail to identify Christ as someone who is directly said to have lived on earth, whether at a specified time and place or not. The second is that such passages can have other, non-human, interpretations which are in fact pointed to by the texts themselves. (In one case, the possibility of interpolation is also available.) Over the course of the next few chapters, such considerations will be examined in detail, and it will also be seen that many features of these texts argue against an interpretation of their Jesus as one who had lived an unknown life on earth.

One general point may be observed at the outset. If this were the view of Paul and his contemporaries, that their Jesus had at some time lived on earth, we would expect a degree of speculation as to when and where he had lived, whether or what he might have taught, the role of other people in his life, especially those who had crucified him; we would expect an interpretation of him in terms of his possible earthly circumstances. We would also expect to find questions about these things put to apostles like Paul, and efforts by Paul to answer them as best he could.

For in fact, there was a primary source available to Paul to speculate on and answer such questions. His writings show that much, if not all, of his gospel about Jesus comes from scripture. But scripture has supplied only the basics: his death and resurrection and a few other theological elements of the long-hidden "secret" about God's Son. Why would scripture not have been similarly mined to reveal other aspects of Jesus' activities—namely, details of his life on earth? If Paul was using 'prophecies' in scripture to reveal the fact and significance of Christ's redeeming act, surely scripture would also have been seen to contain prophecies of much more about him. It could have been used to construct a biography. This, of course, is precisely what the evangelists were later to do. Modern scholarship has revealed the heavy mining of scripture by Mark and those who expanded on him to create the elements of the Gospel story, through the process of midrash. That story, as we shall see, was essentially a fictional creation from start to finish, using passages from the Hebrew bible as its building blocks. It is hard to believe that apostles and biblical exegetes like Paul would not have undertaken a similar process much sooner, to open windows onto the unknown life their Jesus had lived in the past.

Those who acknowledge a general commonality between the epistles' view of Christ in regard to ritual and soteriology, and that of the myths of the Greek

mystery cults, often overlook a notable difference between them. As we shall see, the cultic myths are rich in 'biography' concerning the savior gods' lives and activities; elaborate stories symbolizing the 'dying and rising' process originally set in primordial time are the norm. Pauline Christianity, on the other hand, is starkly bare in this regard. With the savior god phenomenon to set the pace, we should have expected that the initial Christian focus on the event of Christ's death and resurrection would have produced a similar sort of elaborate story, especially when actual historical memories of the man himself were supposedly available. Since Christianity was from the outset in competition with the cults, some of which went back centuries, the need and impulse for such elaboration should have been compelling, and would in fact have provided an element superior to the mysteries if the Christian story had taken place in recent times. A lack of interest in Jesus' life on the part of every early writer before the Gospels is the most unlikely development conceivable.

This is yet another reason why, if Paul's Christ were regarded as a man who had lived on earth in an unknown past, the rapid development of a story-myth about such a man would have been inevitable. The lack of one is not only an indicator that no life on earth was yet envisioned, it is a pointer to the Platonic nature of the Pauline concept of a sacrificed and resurrected Messiah. It is because the Pauline picture, recently created, resided wholly within the spiritual realm that it did not possess or allow for a story-myth which was set on earth. It was only the later Gospels which were to provide that dimension.

A Variable Universe

We must examine, then, the structure of the spiritual world to try to arrive at the particulars of Christ's redemptive activities. Platonic cosmology by the turn of the era envisioned more than a simple dualistic division between spiritual and material parts of the universe. Heaven was a layered realm, a series of ascending spheres delineated and controlled by the planetary bodies which could be regarded as spiritual beings themselves, above which stood the purest sphere of God's own abode. It must be kept in mind that none of this was determined by what we would think of as 'science' (which is why it was so wrong), but was arrived at through purely intellectual contemplation by various philosophers and religious thinkers. As such, while a given 'school' might establish its own general consensus about the details, there was no central authoritative body to lay out an accepted picture in all its aspects, much less impose dogma on the philosophical or religious community. Thus, while the layered universe idea emerges from many sources, it is not always clear as to what details they agree upon, although it is often clear that there are many things they do *not* agree upon.

A common philosophical viewpoint, however, was that there was a major division in the cosmos between "corruptibility" and "incorruptibility." When philosophy or religion posits a heavenly world, there is always a compulsion to attribute to it an absence of the flaws which beset the material world: death, suffering, evil, even the changeability of matter. Gods are usually accorded

perfection, which means that they must live in a perfect realm. (The Greek and Roman pantheon of anthropomorphic gods with their human imperfections was formed in prehistoric times, long before the sophisticated philosophical speculation we are here speaking of arose.) But even the spiritual dimension has its denizens of evil and less-than-perfect elements: subordinate spirits, lesser and fallen angels, even inhospitable landscapes; in a layered universe, gradations can be accommodated. Still, the boundary between incorruptibility and corruptibility was generally placed at the lowest division between the spheres, namely the orbit of the moon. The term "firmament" is sometimes applied to that point of delineation, but it can also refer to the area immediately below the moon which is not part of earth itself. (Here we can ignore one variety of terminology: the occasional use of "firmament" to designate the border between God's highest Heaven and all the spheres below it.) In this system, the demon spirits, part of the realm of corruptibility, were located in the area below the moon, although their activities extended down to earth as well.

Various documents to be examined will illustrate some of the details of this picture, but there are also significant divergences from it. Sometimes suffering and punishment, particularly of angels, can take place in higher spheres; or the moon may not constitute the first sphere. In the Testament of Solomon, the stars are themselves demonic or have resident demons. There are "spirits of the air, the earth, and beneath the earth," some of which can even fly to heaven and overhear God's plans (see the *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* I, p.952-3). The cosmology of the Questions of Ezra (Recension B) has seven heavens, but the lower ones of these (presumably *above* the moon) are evil, with Hell being located in the third heaven (*op.cit.*, p.591f). Ezra is also told by his guiding angel that "the souls of the sinners are seized by the demons who are imprisoned in the atmosphere," which seems to be located below the moon. This is specified as above the earth, since souls that are subsequently freed from such demons fall from there *to* earth, giving us an identifiable distinction between the sublunar areas dominated by the demons, and earth itself. A similar picture is to be found in the Ascension of Isaiah (below), perhaps the closest parallel we have to the apparent cosmology of the Christ cult as found in some of the New Testament.

In the early Christian documents there is much commonality with this widespread focus on the demons. However, finer divisions and distinctions like those described above are not spelled out, leaving us unsure of how closely Christian cosmology followed the general picture, or what divergences it may have contained. Where the Pauline corpus is concerned, we cannot do much more than identify an unspecified spiritual dimension in which Christ died and was resurrected, although the role he gives to the demon spirits in the death of Christ suggests that he could have subscribed to the sublunary concept as well. On the other hand, it may be that the early Christ cult was not so concerned over such delineations, and may simply have regarded Jesus' redemptive actions as taking place in a dimension beyond earth, a 'world of myth.' We will take a closer look at such a world after surveying the mystery cults in the next chapter.

Descending Redeemers

The concept that a divine being, in order to grant saving knowledge or perform a redeeming act, had to enter the realm of corruptibility was a product of philosophical reasoning. Contact was not possible between the world of matter and the higher spiritual spheres where deity was unsullied by any contamination with the imperfect physical world, although visions granted to mystics could unveil something of their nature and activities. Savior figures, whether in Judaism, Greco-Roman mythology and the Hellenistic mysteries, or Gnosticism and early Christianity, made salvation possible in a variety of ways. The most predominant was the granting of knowledge which itself conferred salvation; to effect this, the god or emissary of Deity had to descend to make contact with humanity. If the task of salvation involved suffering and death, these could not take place in the higher heavens where gods existed in their fully divine state; there they could not do something as human and corrupt as to suffer. Pain, the shedding of blood, death itself: these were the unfortunate features of the lower, baser levels of the universe.

In whatever the system, divinity had to come down to humanity's territory. It had to take on material characteristics and capacities. If contact between spirit and flesh was to be made, the initiative lay with heaven. Deity had to humble itself, compromise its spiritual purity. It had to descend. And descend it did, for the concept of the "descending redeemer" (who afterwards re-ascended) was a pervasive religious idea during this era.

In an important article published in 1975,⁵⁰ Charles H. Talbert surveyed this myth of descending-ascending gods in antiquity. In Greco-Roman mythology, Ovid (*Metamorphoses*, 8, 626-721) and Acts (14:8-13) preserved the motif of the god who comes to earth in human form to give miraculous aid, in this case Jupiter and Mercury. The latter god is also described by Horace as descending to earth, changing his form and assuming the guise of man (*Odes*, I, ii, 41-4). Epiphanies of various gods are described in other surviving literature. In Judaism the motif is surprisingly common, beginning with the personified Wisdom tradition, especially as it evolved around the turn of the era. As seen in chapter 9, this divine emanation of God descends to earth and takes up residence in Israel (Sirach 24, Baruch 3:37) in the form of the Mosaic Law. In the Wisdom of Solomon from the early 1st century CE, perhaps reflecting what were by now less amenable conditions in the Jewish world, Wisdom fails to find a permanent dwelling and re-ascends to Heaven. For this hypostatized heavenly figure, however, there has been no thought of actual incarnation in a human person when she comes to earth. Various angels sent by God also make the sojourn to earth in Jewish writings, and at times they take on the appearance of men and perform saving activities for certain people. They, too, are not regarded as incarnating into actual human beings. As Talbert sums up (*op.cit.*, p.426):

"in certain circles of ancient Jewish angelology, both B.C.E. and in the first and second centuries C.E., there existed a mythology with a descent-ascent

pattern, in which the redeemer figure descends, takes human form, and then ascends back to heaven either after or in connection with his saving activity."

In Hellenistic Judaism, this Jewish motif is becoming merged with the Greek Logos, until one arrives at the concept of an intermediary emanation of God impacting on the world, one which spanned cultures and religions and in various forms was central to the idea of salvation. In many expressions of Gnosticism (though not all) the same motif of a descending figure from heaven is part of the process of achieving salvation. This gnostic motif is no longer seen by scholars as derived from Christianity.

Thus far, the saving figures being considered did not involve a dimension of self-sacrifice. But the suffering and death of a god motif was elsewhere on the scene, predating Christianity within the pagan mystery cults and in even more ancient mythological expression. Such savior gods, as a rule, underwent death and conquered it; acquiring that knowledge and joining with the god and his acts through the cult's rituals conferred guarantees on the initiates. On both counts, Christianity owed a debt to its predecessors, amalgamating in classic syncretistic fashion various expressions of its day.

The savior god myths began as stories set in a distant or primordial time on earth. But in postulating their conversion to a more Platonic interpretation in the initial Christian period, we find indicators of a new, vertical thinking emerging. Plutarch equates the savior god Osiris with the Logos, and sees him as a symbol of the Logos' activity as 'immanent' in the world, in the sense of it being an intermediary between the highest sphere of the timeless changeless God and the sphere of temporal changing matter. This is akin to the idea of the descending redeemer and of the cultic savior who operates in some lower celestial sphere impinging on the material world. The 4th century philosopher Sallustius regards the myths of savior gods like Attis as allegories of "timeless processes." He calls the story of Attis "an eternal cosmic process, not an isolated event of the past" (*On Gods and the World*, 9), which places his understanding in a timeless spiritual realm. Similarly, his mentor, the emperor Julian the Apostate, describes (*Orations V*, 165) Attis' descent to the lowest spiritual level prior to matter, undergoing his death by castration to give the visible material world order and fruitfulness; he regards this as a symbol of the annual cycle of agricultural rebirth, the generative power which descends into the earth from the upper regions of the stars. Thus, we have suggestions in pagan literature of the concept of the descending god in the mystery cults' interpretations of their myths.⁵¹

The Realm of Flesh

As a deity descended from the higher levels of pure spirit, he passed through ever degenerating spheres of the heavens, and could take on an increasing likeness to lower, material forms as well as an ability to suffer fleshly fates, such as pain and death. The lowest level of the spirit realm was the firmament below the moon and above the earth. This was the domain of the demon spirits—in Jewish parlance, of Satan and his evil angels—and it was regarded as closely

connected to the material earthly world; together, as falling within the sphere of corruptibility, they could be thought of as the 'realm of flesh.' As the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* puts it (vol.VII, p.128), the demonic spiritual powers belonged to this realm of flesh and were thought of as in some way corporeal, though they possessed 'heavenly' versions of earthly bodies. Even the angels "have flesh or at least appear to have it" (*op.cit.*, p.143), though it is a different "corporeality" between humans and angels. (See the reference to the "different flesh" of angels in Jude 7.)

Thus it would have been wholly conceivable for Paul's Christ in that spiritual world to descend into the realm of the demon spirits. Here he would be in the sphere of flesh, which fits the early Christian writers' almost universal use of such stereotyped phrases as "in flesh" and "according to the flesh." Here Christ could assume counterpart characteristics of the visible world, undergo suffering and death at the hands of the evil spirits as a blood sacrifice, and be raised by God back to the highest heaven. Even if it was all a part of God's "mystery," something that had taken place in God's eternal time, hidden for long generations and knowable to men like Paul only through divine revelation.

The Likeness of Flesh

That assumption of flesh on the part of Christ is consistently referred to in the epistles as taking on only the "likeness" of flesh, conveying the clear implication that it was not actual human flesh. This motif fits the descending pattern, as well as the concept that a deity can effect guarantees because he is the paradigm, the heavenly counterpart, of his devotees. Paul sees the effects of Christ's death and resurrection as operating through a principle of 'likeness' (of experience) which results in a corresponding death—Paul's 'dying with Christ' and 'dying to sin'—and a future resurrection for the baptized believer. Christ becomes the paradigm for the believer; upon his descent he becomes the heavenly archetype for the earthly copies. But Christ the paradigm can achieve this only by taking on a likeness of form. He needs to take on this likeness of form before he can undergo the likeness of experience, neither of which can he do in his fully divine state in the higher celestial planes. Thus the descent idea goes hand in hand with the idea of a temporary taking on of likeness; both are an essential part of the same act, two sides of the same coin. As we go through the texts, it will be seen that this idea of likeness to humans is not only pervasive, it cannot simply be interpreted as an oblique way of referring to Jesus' human incarnation.

It might be noted that in the earlier look at Jewish descent-ascent traditions in regard to angels sent to earth, they too were seen to take on a likeness to humans without actually becoming one. The principle to that extent is the same, although such likeness was not for the purpose of becoming a paradigm or to suffer death, but to effect communication with human beings and in some cases perform actions which rescue them from harm. But the fact that these angels went all the way to earth itself does not require us to understand the descent of Christ as involving the same thing. The angels are clearly presented as going to earth and

interacting with humans, whereas in the epistles the same thing is by no means clear. In fact, the latter associate Christ's act only with aspects and entities of the spiritual world and derive it from scripture and contemporary philosophy. And scriptural texts involving descending angels nowhere make the assumption—nor did one lie in the background of contemporary belief—that the angels became actual humans, whereas post-Gospel Christianity maintains that Christ did so.

But if that were the case from the start, there is a peculiarity about this whole linguistic phenomenon of referring to Christ's "likeness" to humans. Why was it necessary and why would it have developed? If God was incarnated as man, then he *was* a man. There should have been no urge to conform to some perceived technicality and insist on stating that because Jesus was God, it needed to be stated that he did no more than bear the "likeness" of a man. (This has nothing to do with the later gnostic doctrine of docetism; and Paul was hardly a docetist.) This would be especially true in the period immediately following people's experience and memory of the historical man himself, when fixating on that remembered man as having only been in the *likeness* of themselves would be an eccentric twist of thought and an unlikely development.

Moreover, this oblique phraseology was not confined to one writer; we find it in the Pauline corpus, in pre-Pauline hymns, in Hebrews and in extra-canonical documents such as the Ascension of Isaiah. But if it *were* some idiosyncratic development which somehow spread throughout Christianity, why is there no further sign of it once the Gospels come along? If Paul and his contemporaries could insist on designating Jesus on earth as only in the *likeness* of flesh, why did not the evangelists? Even though written later, the Gospels and Acts treat Jesus as thoroughly human and refer to him as such with no qualification.

The meaning of the Greek set of words corresponding to "like/likeness"—*homoios*, *homoïoma*—is not "identical," but "near to, similar, a resemblance." In Hebrews 2:14, oft-quoted as 'proof that Christ had been incarnated to earth, it is stated that Jesus the Son had "in like manner [*paraplesids*] shared the same things" (with the children of God, namely blood and flesh). This Greek word, too, does not mean to become the thing itself, but only "similar to." (This is fortunate for Epaphroditus in Philippians 2:27; if his illness had been identical to death, Paul would have been writing an obituary and not praising God for his colleague's recovery.)

The 'likeness' idea is the language of paradigmatic parallelism. Christ, to fulfill his role as heavenly counterpart and guarantor of salvation, must possess certain counterpart characteristics—namely, blood and flesh, which are the only ones the author mentions. A few verses later, in 2:17, the idea is repeated:

For this reason, he had in all things to become like [*homoidthenai*] his brethren, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people.

But as will be seen when looking more closely at the Epistle to the Hebrews, these "things pertaining to God" and becoming a high priest, and particularly the act of atonement itself, take place *in heaven*, with the sacrifice being made in the

heavenly sanctuary. Despite the "in all things," no aspects of being "in the likeness of men/flesh" are offered which would require locating on earth.

Even the idea of 'testing' or being 'tempted' which follows in 2:18 (repeated in 4:15) is related to "what he suffered," which demonstrates that the likeness and the testing relate specifically to his death, a death which can be placed in the heavenly world. It would be bizarre to think that early Christians regarded a Jesus on earth as having been tempted at every turn, "in every way" to commit sin, forced to struggle against the countless human temptations in order to achieve a sinless state. But to be tempted to forego his suffering and death, to disobey his father's wishes and abandon his role as savior: that would have been quite conceivable, even for a heavenly entity. In fact, the paradigmatic parallel is clearly presented in 2:18, in that Christ having been tempted to abandon his responsibility in his great testing makes him able to help his followers on earth who are also being tempted to abandon their faith and allegiance to the sect.⁵²

We can look at other uses of the "likeness" idea in the literature. Hebrews 7:3 says of Melchizedek: "having been made like [*aphdmoidmenos*] the Son of God, he remains a priest forever." This does not mean that he in fact become the Son of God. Paul in Romans 9:29 quotes Isaiah, saying "we would have become as Sodom and we would have resembled [*homoidthemen*] Gomorrah," without meaning that they would have become those actual cities. In Genesis 1:26, humans are said to be made "in the likeness of (God)" (*kath' homoidsin* in the Septuagint), but that does not mean that humans became God.

Particular appeal is often made to Romans 8:3, "God (sent) his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh." Here the inclusion of the word "sinful" does not change things. Paul is simply referring to the inherent nature of flesh. For him, all human flesh was sinful, which is why he declares that it can never possess the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15:50). He is not saying that Christ in his *sinless* human flesh was in the likeness of *sinful* human flesh. Moreover, at the very least we would expect a need for some discussion, here or elsewhere, of how, despite Jesus' flesh being human, it was *not* sinful.

Christological Hymns

The Pauline corpus contains examples of Christ cult mythology, liturgical poems about the descending divine Son which scholars call "christological hymns." These are generally regarded as pre-Pauline, though no one has any idea who wrote them. Here we can lay out the hymn in Philippians 2:6-11:

⁶For the divine nature was his from the first; yet he did not think to snatch at equality with God, ⁷but made himself nothing, assuming the nature [or form] of a slave. Bearing the human likeness, ⁸revealed in human shape, he humbled himself, and in obedience accepted even death—death on a cross. ⁹Therefore God raised him to the heights and bestowed on him the name above all names, ¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow—in heaven, on earth, and in the depths—"and every tongue confess, 'Jesus Christ is Lord,' to the glory of God the Father. [NEB]

This is the early Christian epitome of the descending-ascending redeemer myth, indeed it encapsulates the entire nature of the early Christian Savior: a subordinate deity, an emanation of God whose primary role was to be sacrificed and exalted. There is not a breath of identification with any Jesus of Nazareth. Three times does the hymn allude to the idea that this divinity took on a likeness to base, material form, but never does it say that he became an actual man, much less give him a life on earth or include any details of such a life. Instead, this deity descends to undergo death—some commentators feel that the phrase "death on a cross" is probably a Pauline addition,⁵³ since it interrupts the pattern of the poetic lines—and is raised back to the highest heaven, where he is exalted.

Further observations about this hymn are interesting. This divinity is said to have received the name of "Jesus" (Savior, or Yahweh saves) only at the time of his exaltation after death. It is argued that the term "Lord" (v.l 1) is the 'name' Jesus received after his resurrection; but "Lord" is a title, not a name, and verse 10 states that "at the *name of Jesus* every knee should bow." A reception of the name Jesus only after resurrection would in itself rule out a previous incarnation on earth in the person of a man who had borne that name.

Furthermore, one wonders why the hymnist stated *three times* that this Jesus took on a likeness to humanity ("assuming the form of a slave / bearing the human likeness / revealed in human shape"). This may have been necessitated by the poetic structure of the hymn, which has its lines grouped in two mirror-like halves, a structure called "chiastic." But if the hymnist needed some material to fill a couple of available lines, why did he not devote them to some details about the incarnated life which these verses are claimed to refer to?

A shorter hymn in 1 Timothy 3:16 offers a similar descent-ascent pattern performed by a divine being:

He who was manifested/revealed in flesh, vindicated in spirit, seen by angels; who was proclaimed among the nations, believed in throughout the world, glorified in high heaven.

Once again there is no identification with a human man, and any suggestion of a ministry is pointedly lacking. This deity seems to have been seen only by angels and engaged in no proclaiming of his own. One understanding of the "in flesh" of the first line (*en sarki*), as with the "*kata sarka*" in similar contexts, can be "in the sphere of the flesh." If Jesus was believed to have lived a life on earth, we can hardly think that every Christian hymnist—which extends to the hymns in Colossians 1:15-20 and Ephesians 1:3-10—would leave out all reference to that life. However, no Christian writer or hymnist expresses the view that the Christ myth is allegorical or symbolic. Paul seems to have very much believed in the divine Jesus' literal suffering at the hands of the demon spirits.⁵⁴

All of these hymns, with their strange anomalies, have stood in the New Testament epistles for centuries, and much scholarly analysis has gone into them. They have resisted understanding because erroneous preconceptions have been brought to them and plainer meanings ignored. But without the Gospels and their historical Jesus in mind, they can be seen for what they are: reflections of ancient

world mythic thinking, the basis of which has long been abandoned. G. A. Wells has pronounced much of what is found in the epistles as "unintelligible" to modern readers. And correctly so. This is because we have lost sight of the context for Pauline belief, or have refused to apply it, blinded as we have been for 19 centuries by the artificial creations of the Gospels.

The Descent of the Son

In a Jewish/Christian piece of writing called the Ascension of Isaiah (part of the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha) we can find corroboration for this picture of a divine Son who descends into the lower reaches of the heavens to be crucified by the demon spirits. This document falls into two sections which were originally independent. The second section, the Vision of Isaiah (chapters 6-11), underwent its own evolution before being combined with the first, and it contains a detailed picture of the descent-ascent motif we have been discussing.

This is a difficult document to analyze in any exact fashion, since the several surviving manuscripts differ considerably in wording, phrases and even whole sections. It has been subjected to much editing in a complicated and uncertain pattern of revision. Many of its elements are quite revealing, not the least for the picture they disclose of the *evolution* of thought about the descending Son and his role. That picture indicates that in its earlier strata, the Vision speaks of a divine Son who operates entirely in the supernatural realm.

There are three classes of surviving manuscripts of the Ascension of Isaiah: Ethiopic, second Latin, and Slavonic. The first, the fullest and most important version, is thought to be based on one Greek text, the other two on a different Greek text. The composite document as we know it, represented in the Ethiopic, was fashioned some time in the 4th to 6th centuries, although surviving manuscripts do not precede the later Middle Ages. There are significant differences in the text between the Ethiopic on the one hand, and the second Latin and Slavonic on the other. The most notable is a Gospel-like passage in chapter 11 which is found only in the Ethiopic version. The other two manuscript lines include only the second section of the work, the Vision of Isaiah, chapters 6 to 11, which is the part we are concerned with.

The community that wrote this "vision," probably toward the end of the 1st century CE, lived in a world of apocalyptic expectation and revelation from the Holy Spirit (6:61). Salvation is expected for the righteous elect, who will be exalted as a result of the death and exaltation of the Son (the paradigmatic parallel effect). Isaiah is granted a vision in which he ascends through the seven layers of the heavens and receives a view of God and his Beloved, also called the Chosen One and Christ. He learns that this Son is to descend to the lower world, where he will be killed and rise, bringing with him the souls of the righteous dead from Sheol as he re-ascends to the highest heaven.

First, we can look in passing at a passage during Isaiah's ascent to see how this group viewed the features of the lower heavens. In chapter 7, Isaiah and his angelic guide are beginning their ascent from earth:

⁹And we went up into the firmament [Knibb (translator): 'the vault of the sky, here thought of as separating the earth from the seven heavens'], I and he, and there I saw Sammael [Satan] and his hosts; and there was a great struggle in it, and the words of Satan, and they were envying one another. ¹⁰And as above, so also on earth, for the likeness of what (is) in the firmament is here on earth. "And I said to the angel, "What is this (war and) envying (and struggle)?" ¹² And he said to me, "So it has been ever since this world existed until now, and this struggle (will last) until the one comes whom you are to see, and he will destroy him."

Here a distinction is made between the vicinity of the earth itself and the firmament, the area below the moon that can be entered "into" and in which Satan and his hosts live and act. That distinction between areas is also implied in 7:28: "And again he took me up into the fourth heaven, and the height from the third to the fourth heaven was greater than (from) earth to the firmament." Isaiah's words (in verse 10) also reveal the writer's concept of a counterpart relationship between features and activities in the firmament and those on earth, a "likeness" existing between earth and heaven. This is an important indicator that earth-like actions by spiritual beings were seen as taking place in the heavens. It also verifies the mechanism of paradigmatic parallel between the actions of the savior god in the spiritual realm and those of believers linked to him on earth.

We can now proceed to the picture of the descent of the Son, and jump ahead to chapter 10, where in the seventh heaven Isaiah witnesses a set of detailed instructions given by God to the Son, telling him how he is to descend through the heavenly spheres and what he is to do in his mission to the lower world. These instructions leave out all mention of the Son on earth and entail quite a different focus on his task. (Translation and commentary by Michael Knibb from *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol.2, p.143-176.)

"⁸GO out and descend through all the heavens. You shall descend through the firmament and through that world as far as the angel who (is) in Sheol, but you shall not go as far as Perdition. ⁹And you shall make your likeness like that of all who (are) in the five heavens, and you shall take care to make your form like that of the angels of the firmament and also (like that) of the angels who (are) in Sheol..."

The Son is directed to go through the firmament, the area just below the moon, as far as Sheol. One can assume that Sheol is located below the earth, giving us no mention of a stop on earth, let alone anything that must be done there. ("Perdition" seems to be a reference to the ultimate, deepest area of Sheol, the place of final punishment for the wicked; here the Son is not to enter, since such souls cannot be rescued.) We also have a graphic example of a descending deity taking on the form (a 'likeness') of the inhabitants of the spheres he visits or passes through. Once again, this taking on of such forms is specified for the firmament and also for Sheol, but is notably missing in regard to earth itself.

In Sheol, the Son is to await the summoning voice of the Father, when

"¹²you may judge and destroy the princes and the angels and the gods of that world, and the world which is ruled by them, ¹³for they have denied me..."

Here we see that primary focus on the evil spirits, the prime task of the Son to destroy them and their control over the living and the dead. The "world" referred to is the sublunary realm as a whole, including Sheol, and the purpose of Christ's sacrifice is to destroy the power and power base of the evil demons. But while such a 'world' can be said to encompass the earth, the instruction hardly includes the destruction of the earth itself or the rulers of the earth. The Son's mission relates entirely to the spiritual aspects of that 'world,' this being another indicator that distinctions are made within the sublunary realm and that the spiritual dimensions of it can be singled out and treated separately. Following this mission against the spirit powers in the spirit dimensions (including Sheol), the Father says:

"¹⁴And afterwards you shall ascend from the gods of death to your place, and you shall not be transformed in each of the heavens, but in glory you shall ascend and sit at my right hand."

No mention is made, nor room provided, for a sojourn and activity on earth. The ascension takes place from "the gods of death" (in Sheol) all the way to the Son's "place" at the right hand of God.

No specific mention has been made here of the sacrifice of the Son, possibly because that has been detailed in the preceding chapter 9. There, as they enter the seventh heaven, Isaiah wonders to his guiding angel why the righteous in that heaven do not yet wear their destined crowns and sit on their thrones. He is told:

¹²

And he said to me, "They do not receive the crowns and thrones of glory...until the Beloved descends in the form in which you will see him descend. ¹³The Lord will indeed descend into the world in the last days, (he) who is to be called Christ after he has descended and become like you in form and they will think that he is flesh and a man..."

The text to this point is different in the Latin/Slavonic manuscripts, where it is rearranged and somewhat simplified, and the line "he who is to be called Christ" to "they will think that he is flesh and a man" is not included. This point will be discussed shortly. What follows is a description of the crucifixion scene:

"¹⁴And the god of that world will stretch out [his hand against the Son], and they will lay their hands upon him and hang him upon a tree, not knowing who he is. ¹⁵And thus his descent, as you will see, will be concealed even from the heavens so that it will not be known who he is. ¹⁶And when he has plundered the angel of death, he will rise on the third day..." .

This prophesied action takes place entirely in the heavens. "The god of that world"—meaning Satan—stretches out his hand, and they—Satan and his evil angels—hang the Son upon a tree, not knowing who he is. The Latin/Slavonic line has "*he* will hang him upon a tree," showing that the focus is indeed on 'the

god of that world' and not on any human agents on earth. The motif of not knowing who the Son is comes tellingly close to Paul's "rulers of this age" (1 Cor. 2:8) who were ignorant of God's purpose and inadvertently crucified the Lord of glory. Since the identity of the Son is declared to be concealed "from the heavens," this ignorance is on the part of those in heaven, not on earth.

Instead of the final sentence in the above quote, the Latin/Slavonic has: "And he will seize the prince of death, and will plunder him, and will crush all his powers, and will rise on the third day." This makes it even clearer that the Son's purpose and what he does prior to his 'rising' is nothing on earth, much less the Gospel events, but rather is to deal with the evil spirit forces who up to this time have controlled the souls of the dead. If Jesus had lived on earth, if his career was perceived as anything resembling the Gospel events and meaning, this total and exclusive focus on what he does in the spirit world would not be possible.⁵⁵

The text goes on:

"...and (he) will remain in that world for five hundred and forty-five days.

¹⁷ And then many of the righteous will ascend with him, whose spirits do not receive (their) robes until the Lord Christ ascends and they ascend with him."

The reference to 545 days, in the opinion of Michael Knibb (*op.cit.*, p. 170, n.'v'), is a later insertion (in the Ethiopic line only) based on Valentinian and similar gnostic doctrine which "believed that Jesus remained with the disciples after the resurrection for eighteen months (i.e., approximately 545 days)."

At this point we can consider the earlier phrase in verse 13, noted above, which is not present in the Latin/Slavonic manuscripts: "(he) who is to be called Christ after he has descended and become like you in form and they will think that he is flesh and a man." First of all, Knibb voices the possibility that "all references to 'Jesus' and 'Christ' in chapters 6-11 are secondary"—that is, added later (p. 170, n.'g'). But there is also an apparent anomaly in the phrase "they will think that he is flesh and a man," for this seems at odds with the theme of the Son changing his form to be like the angels in each heaven, particularly in the firmament where he was directed (10:10) to assume the form of the evil angels, not of an earthly man. That motif is repeated in 10:30: "And I saw when he descended and made himself like the angels of the air [the firmament], and he was like one of them." The same idea is touched on in 11:23 during Christ's re-ascent: "...he was in the firmament, but was not transformed into their form."

But if a gnostic-oriented editor in the Ethiopic manuscript line has had his fingers on this passage, as indicated by the 545 days, it is possible that the original text has been corrupted or enlarged (the line is not there at all in the Latin and Slavonic versions, indicating that it is indeed an insertion) to reflect a later docetic milieu. Certainly, the extant phrase would not represent an orthodox view of the matter, which was strongly anti-docetic, nor could it be the product of any Gospel-oriented editor, with its implication that Christ was *not* a man.

In fact, thus far we have encountered a piece of writing which is not only quite primitive, but even "non-Christian" as orthodoxy is viewed. Where is the sense of universality in the underlying soteriology, where the atonement concept

we associate with standard Christianity? It is not there. There is no dying for sin. What the Ascension of Isaiah presents is a simple rescue operation on the part of the Son, freeing prisoners from the clutches of the evil angels who control the lower parts of the universe and block access to Heaven. The heavenly paradigm is acting on behalf of the righteous trapped in Sheol, to exalt them as he becomes exalted. (This will also make possible a similar rising of the righteous who shall die in the future.)

The atmosphere of the righteous inheriting their destined thrones and crowns in heaven is strongly sectarian, presenting the salvation of an elect, which bears a resemblance to the thought found in Revelation and in the Similitudes of Enoch. If "Jesus" and "Christ" are later additions, we would not even be able to label this document 'Christian' but rather a case of Jewish sectarianism, although something that was in itself 'proto-Christian.' Here we have another example, another puzzle piece, in the picture of uncoordinated diversity in the period's interpretation of the intermediary Son, none of which goes back to a Jesus of Nazareth. Rather, that diversity is gradually being drawn into a gravitational field of coalescing Savior belief, with editings and insertions performed as features of that field multiply and expand.

Introducing an Historical Jesus into the Ascension

Now we can consider the next step in this evolution, as reflected in the Ascension of Isaiah, chapter 11. Following the two visionary descriptions of the descent of the Son in chapters 9 and 10, we are led into a scene on earth in this way, picking up from the final verses of chapter 10:

³⁰And I saw when he descended and made himself like the angels of the air [i.e., the firmament], that he was like one of them. ³¹And he did not give the password, for they were plundering and doing violence to one another. [Chapter 11] 'And after this I looked, and the angel who spoke to me and led me said to me, "Understand, Isaiah, son of Amoz, because for this purpose I was sent from the Lord..."

At this point, the Latin/Slavonic manuscripts add:

"...to show you all things. For no one before you has seen, nor after you will be able to see, what you have seen and heard." And I saw one like a son of man, and he dwelt with men in the world, and they did not recognize him.

Thereafter, the whole of verses 2-22 of chapter 11 are omitted.

Instead of that brief passage in the Latin/Slavonic, the Ethiopic line contains a lengthy scene on earth, beginning this way:

"...because for this purpose I was sent from the Lord." ²And I saw a woman of the family of David the prophet whose name (was) Mary...

There are many arguments to be made that the latter version should be considered a later expansion, despite Knibb's opinion (p. 154) that "the primitive character of this narrative [11:2-22] makes it difficult to believe that it did not form part of the original text." Elsewhere (p. 146) he suggests that the Greek text

on which the Latin and Slavonic manuscripts were based was a "revision" of the one on which the Ethiopic was based, and that the 11:2-22 passage had been cut from the latter because of its "legendary features." But this would not seem to make much sense. What editor would have been willing to sacrifice a 20-verse account of the Son on earth, the only mention of such a thing in the document, and replace it with a simple "and he dwelt with men in the world, and they did not recognize him"? What Christian scribe ever showed aversion to "legendary features"? If it somehow did create a negative impression, experience shows that later scribes consistently revise—if anything, expanding and making things more detailed—not slash to virtually nothing.

At the same time, if we can accept that the bare alternative verse of the Latin/Slavonic version is closer to the original, we can hardly believe that this represented a knowledge on the part of that writer or editor about an earthly Jesus and a Gospel-like story attached to him. What would have prompted him to deal with it in such a perfunctory fashion? He has gone into such minute detail about the descent of the Son through the heavens and his dealings with the spirit entities which inhabit the non-material spheres. When he gets to the climax of the Son's descent involving an incarnation on earth, if he knows an entire story containing a wealth of tradition (from the Gospels or otherwise) he is hardly likely to reduce it to a single anti-climactic phrase "he dwelt with men" which tells us nothing. A writer composing a work about Isaiah's vision of the Son's descent could not fail to include something about his life on earth.

The only context in which the extant state of the Latin/Slavonic text is understandable is if the writer knew virtually nothing about a life on earth, but only the bare concept itself, in its most primitive stage (more "primitive" than Knibb's evaluation of chapter 11); perhaps he is an early editor introducing the idea into the text, though without benefit of having had contact with a written Gospel. On the other hand, we can tell nothing about the envisioned nature of this 'dwelling with men in the world,' for it is substantially the equivalent of the declaration that personified Wisdom came to earth and dwelt among men—and where Wisdom was concerned, no material incarnation was envisioned.

The bulk of the interpolation of the Ethiopic 11:2-22 is, curiously, taken up with a primitive Nativity story, in which Jesus is born in Mary and Joseph's house in Bethlehem. It is more primitive than either of the Gospel birth accounts, having no manger, shepherds, angels, Herod or magi bearing gifts. The child is born to a Mary who has not been forewarned of the birth or even aware that she was pregnant. A few verses are then devoted to mentioning the performance of "great signs and miracles in the land of Israel" but with no examples given, to the children of Israel being roused against him, handing him to the ruler (no one is specified, though Knibb does "assume" it is Pilate), and he is crucified on a tree in Jerusalem, to rise after three days.

The sequence of events in these verses is clearly garbled, which suggests that the passage was tinkered with perhaps after the initial interpolation, as more detail developed. The seams and discontinuities are evident:

¹⁹And after this the adversary [Satan] envied him and roused the children of Israel, who did not know who he was, against him. And they handed him to the ruler, and crucified him, and he descended to the angel who (is) in Sheol.

²⁰In Jerusalem, indeed, I saw how they crucified him on a tree, ²¹and likewise (how) after the third day he rose and remained (many) days. ²²And the angel who led me said to me "Understand, Isaiah." And I saw when he sent out the twelve disciples and ascended. [This is followed by verse 23, "And I saw him and he was in the firmament," which brings us back into the pre-interpolated text.]

Not only is this disjointed, with things out of sequence and crudely put together, it betrays no usage of independent historical traditions. Rather, the interpolator has simply taken up and reworked motifs that were present in the earlier, pre-historicist stage of the document itself. Satan envying, the children of Israel not knowing who he is, crucifixion on a tree in Jerusalem, the rising after three days: these are all motifs borrowed from the previous mythical layer of the document and recast into a primitive historical scenario.

There is also another indicator that 11:2-22 is an interpolation. The following verses recount the ascent of Christ back through the heavens. But the (evil) angels of the firmament only now recognize who he is:

²³And I saw him, and he was in the firmament, but was not transformed into their form. And all the angels of the firmament, and Satan, saw him and worshiped. ²⁴And there was much sorrow there as they said, "How did our Lord descend upon us, and we did not notice the glory which was upon him, which we now see was upon him from the sixth heaven?"

Yet if the Gospel story and an incarnation to earth were known to the writer, he would not have portrayed Satan and his angels as only now recognizing the Son, for they should have become aware of his identity as they witnessed his life on earth; the Gospels have even the exorcised demons recognizing Jesus as the Son of God.

It is clear that the Latin and Slavonic texts are earlier (especially since they do not contain chapters 1-5 section which are present in the composite Ethiopic), and that the Greek text behind the Ethiopic has enlarged upon an earlier Greek version lying behind the others. Even within the Ethiopic text of 11:2-22 we can detect signs of incremental expansion and revision. For example, in 11:21, in referring to how long Christ remained on earth after rising, different manuscripts have varying lengths of time, one being "forty days" perhaps under the influence of Acts. The Ascension reveals an evolution from a spiritual Christ operating in a supernatural setting, to a physical Christ living a life in an earthly setting. A document is being periodically revised (by multiple redactors in different versions) to reflect new developments in myth and doctrine. The Gospels are a further advanced stage, although it is impossible to know if they owe any debt to the Ascension of Isaiah itself, or whether the ideas in the latter's interpolation have been influenced by newly circulating ideas ultimately derived from Mark.

When Mark came to write his midrashic tale about a Jesus on earth, the war fought by heaven and the Son against the demons was translated into Jesus' war on earth against the new, humanized demons: the Jews. Just as the "rulers of this age," the evil spirits, were the murderers of Christ in the Pauline phase, the earthly rulers, Jews along with the Romans, became the Christ-killers in the Gospel version. When Mark's symbolic character Jesus of Nazareth became historical, that allegory, too, was turned into history.

The progression in the Ascension conforms to the overall pattern we see in the Christian documentary record as a whole: the introduction of basic concepts of a Christ on earth being expanded to add more detail. That progression is reflected and paralleled in 1 John's (4:3, and 2 John 7's) bare "that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh," to Ignatius' basic biographical details about the flesh that *had* come, to an expanded life-on-earth picture in the epistle of Barnabas (though still primitive and mainly based on scripture), to the ever widening appearance of elements of the Gospel story as the 2nd century progresses.

We have seen in this document that one of the Son's principal tasks is the conquest of Satan and his evil spirits, which brings us into the thought world of the New Testament epistles, as in 1 Corinthians 2:8 and Colossians 2:15. As noted earlier, the New Testament is much less specific about how the layers of the heavens figure in their picture of the sacrificed Son, but we do find a few allusions to the general concept. Paul mentions his own ascent into the heavens in 2 Corinthians 12, where he received "visions and revelations granted by the Lord." He relates that he "was caught up as far as the third heaven." On the scale of the Ascension's seven heavens, this might not seem to be too noteworthy, but it is possible that for Paul (as it is for the odd other Jewish writer, as in the Testament of Levi) the third heaven was the ultimate one. He goes on to say, "And I know that this man was caught up into paradise and heard inexpressible words which a man is not permitted to speak." It is unclear whether he is enlarging on his experience in the third heaven, calling it paradise, or is describing a separate or further vision to an even higher realm.

From the documentary record both Jewish and pagan (and there is more to survey), it is clear that much variation existed in the concept of the layered heavens and what went on in them, just as there were many variations in the nature of the savior and how he conferred salvation. We should not be looking for exact correspondences between Paul's Christ and Jewish sectarian systems, or between the features of the early Christian savior and those of the Hellenistic mysteries. We can set aside the oversimplification of a direct and conscious copycatting between the Christ cult and its predecessors and contemporaries. But the obvious commonality of ideas both general and specific found across the ancient Mediterranean world is enough to allow us to recognize the Christian version of salvation as one more expression of the philosophical and religious thinking of the time, one more case of drawing on common 'in the air' ideas. Much more of that commonality is still to be examined.

The Mystery Cults

Tracing Jesus' Family Tree

There is no question that Pauline Christianity contains important elements which are deeply rooted in the Jewish scriptures and cultural heritage. At the same time, the nature of the salvation it offers, the sacramentalism involved, the features of its saving deity, are heavily derivative of non-Jewish precedents. But that is what religious syncretism is all about. Different beliefs and practices are combined to create something new, not with any overtly conscious intent, but because over time the human mind is continually generating fresh ideas out of what it assimilates from the past and the environment. This guarantees ongoing relevance, nourishment, and even healthy competition. Christianity was the great synthesizer of the ancient world's religious ideas, with mixed results for future western society.

Elements of Paul's Christ Jesus bear too close a resemblance to the savior gods of the Greco-Roman mystery religions to allow it to be claimed that one has nothing to do with the other. There may be no evidence for an overt "borrowing" directly from the mysteries on the part of Paul (though we might advance an argument for one such case), yet it is undeniable that both phenomena are expressions of similar needs and impulses; both are branches of the same ancient world tree. The acts of Osiris, Attis, Isis and other savior deities who made salvation available to a host of initiates inhabited, in many ways, the same conceptual world as did Christianity's Christ.

Some scholars claim that "religions" is too strong a word for these organizations.⁵⁶ During the Empire it could be said that they were conducted almost like guilds, with rites that were to be kept secret and membership that was in some ways select, if only because it could cost a hefty sum to go through all the stages of initiation. But some of these salvation "cults" (perhaps the better word for them) were widespread and entailed well-developed philosophies and mythologies. Ethics, with the exception of Orphism, were usually of relatively minor concern. Their rites, which included various types of baptism, were looked upon as conferring a new birth on the initiate, protection in this world from harmful spirits and forces of fate, and the promise of some form of happy afterlife. In the Greek way of seeing things, the latter did not involve bodily resurrection but only an immortality of the soul in blissful conditions. By the 2nd century CE, the cult of Isis, the Egyptian goddess who contributed so much to the picture of the Christian Mary, mother of Jesus, was verging on a universal

religion. Mithraism, though confined to men and strongest among the military orders, became a virtual state religion in the Roman empire during the century before Constantine converted to Christianity.

The roots of the mysteries are obscure. It was thought that the primitive common denominator behind these diverse cults was the yearly agricultural cycle, the dying and renewing of vegetation and food crops. People's experience of nature's round led to the concept that the gods who inhabited these plants or the earth they grew from regularly underwent a representative dying and rising themselves (thus the term "dying and rising gods"), or had once done so, perhaps even as a sacrifice to guarantee the annual return of fertility. Mythical stories grew up to embody such divine experiences.⁵⁷

Although the cycle of the seasons undoubtedly played a formative part, scholars have recently been looking as well at male "rites of passage" in prehistoric societies. In these rites the tribe's youths were given sacred teachings and prepared by ordeals and secret ceremonies for a change of status and acceptance into adult life. Another suggested source was the cult of dead kings, such as the Pharaohs in Egypt and the Hittite rulers in Asia Minor. Whatever the origins, it seems clear that the initiates in the mystery cults, through ceremonies and conformity to the group tenets, linked their destinies with that of the divinity being worshiped.

We will start by making brief surveys of the major mysteries, after which comparison of certain of their elements with those of Christianity will be undertaken. While much speculation has been possible, frustratingly little is known about the cults. It is impossible to describe the rites of a single one of them, let alone identify the interpretations the devotees put on whatever experiences they underwent. The injunction to secrecy about the rites and their meaning was universal—one of the points of contrast with Christianity—and pretty well universally observed.

The word "mystery" (*mysterion*) was generally used in the plural—the mysteries of Dionysos, the mysteries of Isis—to refer collectively to the rites, conferred insight and accrued benefits from the god, as received by the devotees. One was "initiated into" the mysteries of such and such a deity. A "*mystes*" was one so initiated. The rite itself, which varied from cult to cult, involved an experience, usually in a group and conducted by one or more priests of the cult, constituting "things seen/shown" (*deiknumena*), "things heard/said" (*legomena*), and "things staged" (*dromena*). All of which provoked a feeling or insight on the part of the initiate, if not some form of ecstatic vision—a virtual epiphany. Preparation for the rite could involve fasting or meditation, even isolation. The total experience gave the initiate an understanding of reality in terms of mystical experiences of the god and the role the god played in the workings of the world, along with a conviction that his or her new relationship with the god would bring a better fate in this world and a fortunate afterlife.

That said, it must be acknowledged that the characteristics of the individual mysteries and their pre-Hellenistic precursors show considerable diversity. They

were anything but carbon copies of each other. And the nature of what constituted 'resurrection' for these gods is particularly diverse. Add to that what is often an extreme murkiness as to what such cults actually believed and what their myths represented. Unfortunately, it is because of these differences and uncertainties that many scholars, whether apologetically motivated or not, will make the claim that we cannot speak of a general category of "dying and rising gods," much less that Christianity can be compared with them as a group. But to move from that state of affairs to say that "there were no dying and rising gods" before Christ is to distort the situation, and there have been those who have seized on this to try to protect a Christian uniqueness. This can be compared to the creationist claiming that because science over the years has disputed the mechanisms of evolution or has not uncovered all the links or provided all the answers, therefore evolution is a false proposition. What the ancient world over the course of perhaps two millennia witnesses to is a widespread indulgence in a branch of religious expression which possessed common tendencies in the features which a given group or culture adopted. Christianity created its own distinctive blend, but there are enough ingredients, and types of ingredients, which they have in common with other expressions to justify the comparison, and particularly to justify the conclusion that it shared ideas and impulses and was a product of its time.

We cannot say with certainty that Paul and the early Christians formulated their doctrines with a conscious eye on the mysteries, but one thing we can safely assume is that if they were in direct competition with salvation cults of this sort, they would not have refrained from calling attention to what was supposedly the most dramatic difference between themselves and their rivals: that the Christian savior god, unlike those of the mysteries, had been incarnated in flesh and had conducted an earthly ministry within living memory. (Their silence is in marked contrast to modern scholars who, when comparing Christianity to the mysteries, regularly point out this very alleged difference.)

The Eleusinian Mysteries

The most important and influential of the mysteries, going back at least to the 6th or 7th century BCE, were those celebrated at Eleusis, a town near Athens. With its myth of the grain goddess Demeter and her daughter Kore (Persephone), the latter kidnapped by the god of the Underworld and ultimately forced to spend part of the year with him beneath the earth and the other part on the surface, we have what is evidently a representation of an agricultural cycle. Initially a local cult, it was taken over by Athens and became a politically directed civic institution, with initiation open to ever wider circles until eventually anyone in the Roman empire (including more than one emperor) could come to Eleusis and be initiated into its mysteries.

Elaborate ceremonies included fasting, ritual bathing, torchlight processions. The myth and rites included the announcement of the birth of a divine child to Demeter, which may have symbolized the initiate's own rebirth. The staged

drama within the initiation hall on the Eleusis site probably enacted some aspect of the Kore myth, while the "things shown" were sacred objects of unknown (to us) nature, displayed by the priest amid the production of a sudden great light. Did Christianity have anything similar? Perhaps not as part of an initiation rite, but Paul does speak cryptically to the Galatians (3:1): "you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified." Whether this referred to a speech, a written proclamation, an effigy, or even some sort of acted-out representation, is not known.

There is much witness in the ancient world itself to the principle that initiation into the mysteries conferred an expectation of a happy afterlife, thus making them "salvation" religions. The Homeric Hymn to Demeter states that initiates could look forward to a far better lot in the afterworld beyond the grave. Isocrates of Athens (4th century BCE) declared that the Eleusinian goddess "makes us look with joyful hope upon the end of life and upon existence as a whole." Cicero wrote: "We have learned [from the Eleusinian mysteries] the beginnings of life, and have gained the power not only to live happily, but also to die with better hopes" (*De legibus*, II, 14, 36). In one of his orations, he praised Athens in its association with Eleusis as the giver of agriculture and other sublime gifts; in myth and the Homeric Hymn, Demeter and Eleusis gave agriculture to the world.⁵⁸

The Mysteries of Dionysos and Orphism

The cult of Dionysos originated in Thrace and spread from there to most of the Greek territories by the 7th century BCE. Its rites, which unlike those of Eleusis could be celebrated anywhere, were initially engaged in by women and involved notorious orgiastic practices, including (so it was said) the tearing apart of animals and eating their raw flesh. As the cult spread to more cultured areas and cities, it was taken in hand by political circles and toned down. Men, too, became involved. Dionysos was a fertility god, and much of the rites associated with him seem to have marked a celebration of life and fecundity, especially the sexual side of life. (That Dionysos—Bacchus in his Roman version—was also the god of wine may have helped in those celebrations.) He too had a myth of descending to the underworld, to rescue his mother Semele. His myth of 'dying and rising' came in two versions: one had him fathered by Zeus, whose thigh served as a substitute womb for the unborn Dionysos at the death of his pregnant mother.

The other was the Orphic version. At some point early in its career, the cult of Dionysos became associated with another set of myths and mysteries, those of Orpheus. Some scholars regard the latter as growing out of the former, a kind of reform movement within it. The myth of Orpheus as a singer whose music tamed wild animals, his accreditation with introducing "culture" to the rough and barbaric world of pre-classical Greece, may reflect the 'taming' of the original Dionysiac cultic rites. And he, too, like many of the savior gods (though he is not ranked as one of these), underwent a violent death.

But Orpheus also introduced other things which had far-reaching effects. Orphism first gave Greek thought the idea that the soul was something separate from the body, having its own existence before and after its emplacement within the latter. The soul underwent a process of purification from the stain of the Orphic 'original sin,' reflected in the second Dionysian myth; this might entail the necessity for reincarnation (the transmigration of souls).

It also, earlier than any other culture including the Judaic, presented us with the principle of punishment and reward in the next world. As more than one commentator has put it, it gave the Greeks a "sense of sin." The world and the flesh are thus devalued, and redemption from them becomes the goal of life. From Orphism, this duality of two worlds, rewards and punishments after death, an eternal soul and a temporary body—the latter being the prison of the former—passed to Plato (perhaps by way of the Pythagoreans of the 6th-5th centuries BCE, who adopted Orphic doctrines) and from there to the mind of western humanity—to its infinite detriment.

The Orphic Original Sin involved the other version of the myth of Dionysos as a dying and rising god. The ritual act of the maenads (mad women) in rending and eating the raw flesh of a wild animal was translated into the myth of the Titans (primordial sons of Heaven and Earth) who rent and devoured the child Dionysos. Zeus, angered at the Titans' action, reduced them to ashes with his lightning bolts. From those ashes humanity arose, who thus inherited the Titans' evil and sinful nature. However, at the same time, since the Titans had eaten Dionysos, humans took on a good, even divine element derived from Dionysos himself, and the tendencies toward good and evil lay side by side in humanity's nature, warring with each other.

It was the goal of humans to let their good nature triumph, to atone for past sins, to achieve the soul's purity (aided through the transmigration between bodies) and reunite with the divine.⁵⁹ One can recognize the roots of some of the fundamental ideas of Gnosticism in these myths, as well as key elements of Christianity. The religious philosophy of the ancient world was an evolving, interlocking organism, one from which Christianity cannot be divorced, let alone given a privileged position.

The Mysteries of Isis and Osiris

The Egyptian goddess Isis became the closest thing to a universal deity achieved by the ancient world, claiming that all gods and goddesses were really expressions of herself. She controlled fate and all supernatural powers. She became the most widely popular divine figure of the first two centuries CE. Her roots in pre-Hellenistic Egypt were complex, and go back into prehistoric times. Together with her husband Osiris and their son Horus, this trio of divinities was a mythical representation of the Pharaonic institution. Since the deceased Pharaoh was considered to continue life in the afterworld, he was identified with the god Osiris, who was the god of the dead. The new, living Pharaoh was identified with Osiris' son Horus, with Isis the mother of both.

The myth of Isis and Osiris is well-known, though details vary since multiple myths have been conjoined. Osiris, the god and embodiment of the habitable Nile valley, is captured by his brother Set, the god of the desert. (The two gods symbolized the see-saw struggle between fertility and aridity in the yearly flooding of the Nile, the flow of life-giving tears from the goddess Isis which is a nature/agricultural motif). Osiris is killed and dismembered, and his parts buried across Egypt. Isis searches for him, finds all the pieces except for the phallus, which she renders artificially and from this conceives and gives birth to Horus, who later takes his revenge on Set for his father's murder. The now-immortal Osiris becomes ruler over the dead in the underworld.

Isis became an expression of the prehistoric figure of the Earth Mother goddess, in line with the Greek Demeter and the Phrygian Cybele and many others around the world. As mother of Horus and the new Pharaoh, she was responsible for the ongoing regeneration of life. The image of "Isis with Horus at her breast" was a common motif in her iconography, and it was adopted wholesale by Christianity and turned into the Madonna and Child we still see today. As a female mourner at the death of Osiris, a common—even required—feature of ancient mythology concerning dying gods, this aspect too was adopted by Christians. The *mater dolorosa* became a motif associated with Jesus. Paul knows nothing of her, but the Gospel phase eventually introduced her when John placed Jesus' mother at the foot of the cross, mourning over her son's demise.

The rites of Isis are alluded to (but kept deliberately elusive) in Apuleius' 2nd century 'novel' *The Golden Ass*. Those of Osiris remain also in obscurity. Originally, the Egyptian rites of Osiris (going back into the early 3rd millennium BCE) were performed on the privileged dead, allowing them to follow the deceased Pharaoh into a continuing life in the afterworld; when in Hellenistic times they evolved into a mystery cult, the rites of initiation became available to the living.

Cybele and Attis

The Phrygian Cybele was the Great Mother (*Magna Mater*) of the ancient world, adopted by Rome from Asia Minor in the 3rd century BCE. Like those of Dionysos, the rites associated with Cybele were originally wild and ecstatic, leading to the self-castration of her priests, known as the Galli, a practice which continued into the Common Era. This extreme measure of dedicating oneself to the goddess' service probably gave rise to the myth of Cybele's Attis and his self-castration. Attis was originally a shepherd boy and lover of Cybele who betrayed her with a nymph or by marrying a king's daughter (the myth varied), although it is uncertain when he entered the Cybele mysteries; there is no sign of him in Rome at the time Cybele was first transported there. Attis underwent a long evolution, eventually reaching the status of a solar deity and savior god by the time of the 4th century CE. He became the subject of much philosophical speculation (as by Julian the Apostate) about the generation of life and the relationship between the upper and lower worlds of spirit and matter.

Commemorating the myth of Attis' death and, apparently, some form of resurrection, the rites of Attis became embodied in a so-called 'passion week' celebration whose features were very similar to the Christian Holy Week observance and mythology. It even took place at the same time of year: March 15 to 27 on the Roman calendar. The festivities included a mourning for his death, with Attis attached to a pine tree (the one under which he died as a result of the castration); then both Attis and the tree were buried. Two days later came a day of rejoicing (the *Hilaria*), which by the 4th century represented a "saving" of the god which conferred a guarantee of similar salvation for the initiate into the Attis mysteries. Exactly when this element, the *Hilaria*, was added to the festivities is a matter of debate. The festival was established officially in Rome under the emperor Claudius (mid 1st century CE), but its specific components at that time are uncertain. However, temple frescoes and artifacts from that period and from the previous century portray Attis in ways which suggest that he has attained immortality and can confer the same on devotees. Maarten Vermaseren (*Cybele and Attis: Myth and Cult*) regards this as an expression of "resurrection" for Attis—a term, however, which will need defining and is not to be equated with the portrayal of Jesus' resurrection in the Gospels.⁶⁰

The Mysteries of Mithras

Mithras, or Mitra/Mithra in his pre-Roman form, was an ancient god whose territory stretched from Asia Minor to Iran and northern India, going back at least into the 2nd millennium BCE. He was a god of oaths and treaties (his name means "covenant"), due to the fact that as a god of light or the sun, he "saw all." He was originally regarded as mediator between Ahura-Mazda, the highest god, and humanity. He aided the ascent of the human soul to heaven after death, being also one who would raise the dead and judge humanity at the end of time. Mithra never enjoyed much success in the Greek Hellenistic world, and was to come into his own as a mystery deity only in the heyday of the Roman empire, under the name Mithras. Although derived from the ancient Persian god, the form the cult took in Hellenistic times is a Greek version. Some scholars locate its inception in Asia Minor about 100 BCE, others as late as the latter 1st century CE. By then, Mithras had lost any working connection to his Persian roots. He was primarily a god for men (women could not be initiated), and popular among soldiers. The cult functioned in small groups of people, using sanctuaries (*mithraea*) that were small and often in caves or even underground (mirroring the cave in which Mithras slew the bull).

The myth of Mithras is more properly referred to as a "cult legend," since this account is not rooted in literary sources or in an ancient piece of mythology, but was put together in Roman times. It has been interpreted by modern scholars from reliefs, sculptures and paintings on surviving monuments, mostly in the *mithraea*. Mithras was born on December 25 by emerging from a rock, a birth, it is said, attended by shepherds. As an adult, he hunts a sacred bull, captures and drags it into a cave where he slays it with a short sword. (There is no death of

Mithras in the Roman form of the cult, despite a common erroneous view to the contrary.) From the bull's blood and semen arise grain and the general vitality of nature. An inscription in the Santa Prisca Mithraeum on the Aventine in Rome says, "You saved us by shedding the eternal blood." Not his own, but of the bull.

Because there seems to have been no direct evolution from the Persian Mitra to the Roman Mithras, scholars have long debated how the cultic myth arose in Roman times. Various astrological theories have been advanced in the past, but David Ulansey (*The Origin of the Mithraic Mysteries*) has recently formulated such a genesis in compelling fashion. He explains the tauroctony (bull-slaying scene) and its various elements in terms of astronomy, arising in Tarsus in that city's long tradition of astral theology, based on the discovery by the astronomer Hipparchus around 128 BCE of the precession of the equinoxes. This 'new' religion arose out of an interpretation of the heavens and its movements, a focus on the astral realm as a reflection of the activities of divinities.⁶¹

We know next to nothing about the actual rites of the Mithras cult and how those ceremonies reflected such astral mythology, but it is clear that the power of Mithras gave him the stature of a savior god. He held the keys to the workings of the universe, enabling those who were linked to him to benefit from his power over the astrological forces that determined life on earth, and after death to pass through the celestial spheres and reach the realm of the gods and a fortunate afterlife. Considering that in the circles represented by Christian thought the demon forces separated earth from heaven, and that one of Christ's primary roles was to destroy the hindering powers of those sundering forces who interfered with humanity's fate and the attainment of Heaven, we can place both thought patterns under the same taxonomic genus of salvation concerns.

The Issue of Resurrection

Now we can approach the question of common features between the mysteries and Christianity, first by way of the most critical one: were the cultic savior gods—those said to have undergone death—"resurrected"? This question can be answered both Yes and No. It is "no" if one insists on such resurrection being of the same nature as that of Jesus portrayed in the Gospels. Greeks did not look for the survival of the body, an idea they found repugnant; it was the soul that was the recipient of everlasting life. Thus they were unlikely to develop gods resurrected in flesh to bestow such a guarantee. But the answer is "yes" if one can see that out of the death of the god comes a conquest of death itself and a transporting of the god to a spirit world and state of immortality guaranteed also to the devotee, one in which he or she will enjoy a happy afterlife. The latter system is the same in principle as the former. Both Christianity and the cults, through the death and transformation of the savior god, are "saved," and whether it is to a Heaven or to an underworld domain of the dead over which a god like Osiris now reigns, makes no matter. (Scholars tend to use the phrase "god of the dead" in an implied derogatory fashion; but Christian language and imagery simply has the advantage of sounding more attractive to us.)

In point of fact, if we compare the mysteries to the Pauline system, there is even less of a difference. Nothing in the New Testament epistles points to a resurrection for Jesus to earth in flesh. Quite the contrary. As we have seen, the epistles portray Jesus as ascending to Heaven immediately upon resurrection, with no interim appearances or time spent with any disciples. Some pointedly state (such as 1 Peter 3:18) that his rising is "in spirit." In other words, in his conquest of death Jesus goes directly to a spiritual dimension. Thus there seems little or no qualitative difference between the fate of the mystery deities and the resurrection doctrine of Paul, with its Jesus who is not only exalted in the spirit world but takes over from a heavenly vantage point the 'rule' over all things in heaven and earth, as in the hymn of Philippians 2:6-11. For scholarship to consistently attempt to play up a non-existent difference between the two is an ill-considered exercise.⁶²

Regardless of the definition brought to "resurrection," the concept itself is inherent in the mystery cult philosophy and ritual. Without it, any understanding of the significance of the god's death, as well as the committed devotion to such gods, would be incomprehensible. It is probably true that the mindset of pagan philosophy involved a greater acceptance of the inevitability of death, and the inherent process in nature of the cycle of death and life (see note 57), whereas the idea of the abolition of death seems to be characteristic of the Jewish side of the Christian makeup. This may be a further reason why any act of 'resurrection' is downplayed in the cults. However, no religion celebrates death as a finality; no religion is formed solely as a cult of mourning with no salvation possible.

Some scholars acknowledge the presence of resurrection motifs pertaining to Osiris, Dionysos and Attis. In addition to Vermaseren on Attis quoted earlier, Martin Nilsson (*The Dionysiac Mysteries of the Hellenistic and Roman Age*, p.39-40) says:

Reading this passage as a whole [*Isis and Osiris* ch.35/364F] one certainly gets the impression that Plutarch has in mind not the awakening of a sleeping god but the raising of him from the dead.

In fact, this is what Plutarch has to say:

Furthermore, the tales regarding the Titans and the rites celebrated by night agree with the accounts of the dismemberment of Osiris *and his revivification and genesis*. [my emphasis]

Splitting hairs as to what those two latter terms technically mean does not change the fact that in some way Osiris was regarded as returning to life.

Gunter Wagner allows that Dionysos "is possibly to be counted among the 'dying and rising' gods," though he immediately moves to water this down by suggesting that his resurrection is only "in the most symbolic sense of the term." Wagner, in his influential 1963 book *Pauline Baptism and the Pagan Mysteries*, makes a determined effort to discredit any possible derivation of Christian ideas from the mysteries, and he does it in ways that are consistently questionable and self-serving. His examination of the cult of Phoenician Adonis, a relatively

minor savior god adopted in some Greek circles, is particularly revealing not only in regard to his methods, but of the very thing he is trying to discredit. Here we can also bring in another device used by apologists against the idea of mystery cult influence: that the influence could have been the other way around.

Adonis began as a vegetation god, but one representing the birth of foliage in the spring followed by a death in the heat of summer. Elements of his myth suggest this, such as his death by a boar, which is the animal peculiar to the god of the summer heat. In the 3rd century BCE, the poet Theocritus put these words into the mouth of a celebrant at the end of the festival:

"Look on us with favor next year too, dear Adonis. Happy has thy coming found us now, Adonis, and when thou comest again, dear will be thy return."
[*Idyll XV*]

Wagner legitimately denies that this constituted official resurrection, but he admits that at a later time "a sort of resurrection is suggested" in Lucian (*De dea Syria*, 6, III), and that the first trace in the annual Adonis festival of rejoicing over the god's return from death is found about 150 CE. This was enough to prompt certain Church Fathers, such as Origen, Jerome and Cyril, to remark on 'a festival of resurrection' for Adonis, one which seems to have begun in the second half of the 2nd century. This appearance of "the resurrection of Adonis as part of the mourning festival" is explained by Wagner this way (*op.cit.*, p. 199):

This gives reason for serious consideration of the possibility of a new development in the Adonis cult under the influence of syncretism, and perhaps also as a result of its struggle to compete with Christianity.

Wagner goes on to admit that "there is much to support the view that the introduction of a celebration of Adonis' resurrection is to be attributed to the influence of the Osiris cult" (p.200). This would certainly be the prime and preferred candidate for influence on a new Adonis resurrection idea, much more so than any Christian influence. It is hardly to be thought that the Adonis cult, or indeed any mystery cult in the mid-2nd century, would be struggling to compete with Christianity. The new religion, throughout the century, was a despised faith, widely persecuted, and we have no evidence that there were huge numbers of Christians in the empire with whom any of the cults had to "compete."⁶³ If syncretism was taking place, it is certainly reasonable that it was happening among the mystery cults themselves. Moreover, if Adonis, a relatively minor cult throughout the empire, was adopting a resurrection motif from other cults, such a concept obviously existed in the latter prior to the mid 2nd century, perhaps at least as early as the 1st century if we can judge by some artifacts unearthed from that time and earlier in regard to Attis. Such earlier dates would even more securely rule out Christianity and Jesus' reputed resurrection as being the example copied by these ancient mysteries.⁶⁴

Firmicus Maternus, a Christian writer of the 4th century who advocated the forcible destruction of pagan idols and cults, made a famous comment regarding what was probably the cult of Osiris (though some have interpreted it as referring

to Attis). In his *De errore profanarum religionum* (*The Error of the Pagan Religions*) 22,1 he says:

On a certain night the effigy of the god is laid on its back on a bier and is lamented with cries of woe and threnodies. Then, when they have had enough of their imaginary grief, a light is brought in. Then the throats of all who have been mourning are anointed by the priest, and when they are anointed, the priest whispers in a slow, murmuring voice: "Take heart, *mystai*, the god has been saved, and for us also shall there be salvation from troubles." [as quoted by Wagner, p.96, translation by Ziegler]

Two paragraphs later, Firmicus makes a contemptuous remark which seems to point even more clearly to a resurrection of the god and the paradigmatic parallel of a resurrection for the believer:

So you should die as he dies, and you should live as he lives [iS7c *moriaris ut moritur, sic vivas ut vivit*]!

This may be a scornful taunt, but supported by the earlier passage it indicates the cult's belief in the resurrection of the god, be it Osiris or Attis. Once again, the suggestion has been made that it represents a copying *in the 4th century* by the Attis or Osiris cult of the resurrection motif from Christianity, a kind of last-ditch effort by the cults to maintain themselves in the face of Christian ascendancy. While such a move might make more sense at this later time, there is no actual evidence that this was the case. Perhaps for that reason, Wagner chooses an alternative suggestion—equally dubious—that Firmicus has made a mistake in reading Christian features into pagan contexts.

One consideration is overriding. No epistle writer, nor any apologist of the earlier centuries, ever claimed that Christianity was the only salvation cult to posit a resurrection of some kind for its god. That would have been a trump card they could not have resisted playing. This is one reason why we can say with confidence that the pagan mysteries—well before any thought that they could have borrowed from Jesus—must have had a resurrection concept for their deities, even if it was not precisely equivalent to that of Christianity. Although in the 1st century, before the Gospels emerged, it *would* have seemed equivalent.

The Issue of Baptism

Everett Ferguson (*Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, p.239) claims critical differences between Christian baptism and immersion rituals in the mysteries. The former was a rite of initiation, he maintains, while the latter were merely a "preliminary purification." But not only is it difficult to know exactly how the cultic ritual was envisioned, it may have been 'preliminary' simply because the mysteries had separate ceremonies for purposes of initiation. Further, Ferguson claims, the effects were different in that Christian baptism conferred the Holy Spirit on the recipient. But pagan initiation as a whole marked the reception of the god and his benefits by the devotee; both are the assimilation of a deity or a part of deity.

Then there is the alleged distinction that pagan baptism constituted "magic" while the Christian one "was a grace-gift of God given to faith in the recipient." The former entails the idea that the act itself, the performance of the rite, directly generates the effect, with no necessary willing participation on the part of the god; whereas to the latter is imputed a conscious decision on the part of God to bestow the grace due to the faith of the recipient. But this is an artificial and semantic distinction. The rite honestly undertaken in either case would bring the benefit. No pagan initiate would think he could fail to have the proper attitude and still put one over on the god, just as no Christian initiate would receive God's gift if he did not hold to the faith. Magic was a case of knowing the right words, pronouncing the secret names of the god; but the Christian ritual also required proper procedure, and that included appealing to the deity's names, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Both kinds of baptism involved the perception that the initiate was entering on a new state of being, a new life. It is often claimed that the mysteries had no concept of "rebirth." But this is belied by ancient testimonies. Ferguson himself (p.299) has admitted that "a few inscriptions speak of the person [undergoing the *taurobolium*—drenched in the blood of a bull slaughtered overhead—in the rites of Attis] as 'reborn,' although one speaks of the person as 'reborn for eternity'." Tertullian, in *On Baptism*, ch.5, says:

At the Apollinarian and Eleusinian games they are baptized; and they presume that the effect of their doing that is their regeneration [rebirth] and the remission of the penalties due to their perjuries [a forgiveness of sin].

Here, Gunter Wagner (*op.cit.*, p.73) is reduced to concluding—in the absence (for us) of surviving evidence—that Tertullian didn't know what he was talking about, that "in speaking of *regeneration* the Church Father is putting a Christian construction upon the pagan festivals that he mentions." (This is akin to the suggestion that apologists like Justin were mistaken in their belief that rituals of the mysteries had preceded the Christian ones, and came up with their 'diabolical imitation' explanation—see note 64—on the basis of that false assumption.) Taken with Wagner's similar suggestion in regard to Firmicus Maternus (above), it is apparent that even ancient Christian witnesses, who lived at the very time when the mysteries were flourishing and who would have had no interest in allotting to the mysteries features they prized as truths in their own faith, are not allowed to give testimony which compromises modern apologetic concerns.⁶⁵

Manfred Clauss (*The Roman Cult of Mithras*, p. 104) notes: "It is therefore intelligible that initiation was understood as a kind of rebirth," and he quotes graffiti on a Mithraeum at Rome which speaks of an initiate being "born" on the day of his introduction into the mysteries of Mithras. Walter Burkert allows (*op.cit.*, p. 100) that inscriptions indicate that "the *mystes* was *natus et renatus*," and that the *taurobolium* "could also suggest an act of birth." Yet, he maintains: "there is no explicit confirmation...nothing as explicit and resounding as the passages in the New Testament, especially in Saint Paul and in the Gospel of John, concerning dying with Christ and spiritual rebirth."

But this is hardly surprising, given the meagerness of the record on the side of the mysteries, when secrecy was the hallmark of only one half of the equation, and when Christianity destroyed so much when it emerged triumphant. Nor is it necessarily legitimate to hold the mysteries up to the standard of a uniquely creative mind like Paul's, especially when little else even in the rest of the Christian record itself can compare to it. It is also ironic that scholars will have no hesitation in accusing the mysteries of borrowing from Christianity in the 4th century in the face of the latter's growing influence and power, and yet have no sympathy for the idea that early Christianity may have done exactly the same in its seminal days, when it was trying to carve out its share of the market and could well have borrowed ideas from popular rivals.

The Issue of the Eucharist

There can be no question that the mystery cults had, as part of their ritual package, a sacred communal meal. Of the cult of Sabazius, Helmut Koester notes (*Introduction to the New Testament*, vol.1, p. 194-5):

There apparently were common cultic meals which—judging from the painting on the Vincentius tomb in Rome—seemed to symbolize one's acquittal before the judge of the dead and reception into the everlasting meal of the blessed.

The cult of Dionysos had a common meal which involved meat and wine. An inscription in Asia Minor "suggests that meat was a chief element of what was consumed" (Martin Nilsson, *The Dionysiac Mysteries*, p.135-6), giving us a cultic practice in which "eating the flesh from a living animal and drinking wine could be understood as incorporating the god and his power within" (Ferguson, *op.cit.*, p.205). Despite significant theological differences between the two, we can see a certain commonality of symbolism with the Christian Eucharist, in that both envisioned the consumption of the god being commemorated. And while the Last Supper's body and blood of Christ represented a "new covenant" with God the Father, this concept can be categorized under the general idea, common to Christianity and the mysteries, that the initiate entered into a union with the deity—whether Father or Son.

Several reliefs depict the Mithraic sacred meal, a ritual reenactment of the second most important theme represented on the cult's monuments: the meal shared by Mithras and the Sun god Helios following Mithras' slaying of the bull. This mythical meal is celebrated on the carcass of the slain animal. Often the figure of the Sun god is presented showing deference to Mithras; Ulansey suggests that this represents the superior power of Mithras over Helios, since he is the god responsible for controlling the macro-movements of the heavens in the precession of the equinoxes, something Helios cannot equal. Such scenes also support the primary scene of the bull-slaying, which depicts grapes emerging from the death-wound in the bull's neck and ears of wheat growing out of its tail: bread and wine, the two staples of the ancient world diet. The meal of the two gods, involving bread and wine, represents that bounty, a bounty proceeding

from the sacrifice of the bull. This type of mythology is more common to the mystery cults, and yet the "bread of life" is also a motif in Christianity. By the actions of a god or gods, the earth and humans are provided with sustenance; nature's operation has been personified in grand myths of divine activities.

Justin Martyr witnesses to the existence of a sacred meal among Mithraists which seems to him so close to the Christian Eucharist, both in regard to the bread and cup as well as the mystical incantations over them, that he must declare the similarity to be the work of the devil [Apology 62]. Such a pagan rite would hardly have arisen only in his own day (mid 2nd century), so there can be no question of borrowing from the Christian Eucharist.

Manfred Clauss comments (<*op.cit.*, p. 109):

The Mithraists evidently believed that they were reborn through the consumption of bread and wine....The offering of bread and wine is known in virtually all ancient cultures, and the meal as a means of binding the faithful together and uniting them to the deity was a feature common to many religions. It represented one of the oldest means of manifesting unification with the spiritual, and the appropriation of spiritual qualities.

Claiming any degree of originality or uniqueness for the tradition known in the Gospels as the Last Supper, or for the Lord's Supper as presented by Paul, cannot be supported. When Paul describes the meaning of the Eucharist in 1 Corinthians 10:14, he is declaring the same basic interpretation seen in the mysteries:

When we bless the cup of blessing, is it not a means of sharing in the blood of Christ? When we break the bread, is it not a means of sharing in the body of Christ?

While Paul, within his Jewish circles, would have inherited a form of thanksgiving meal, he or the phase of the Christ cult which preceded him would likely have made something new of it along the general lines of the sacred meals of the mysteries. He undoubtedly contributed some 'tweaking' of his own to emphasize its sacramental significance (see below).

The word Paul uses for "supper" (*deipnon*) in his account of the "Lord's Supper" in 1 Corinthians 11 was the word commonly used for the cultic meal in the mysteries. That he was familiar with the latter practices (and that they existed in his time) is indicated when he is discussing the Christian meal and contrasting it with others. He urges his readers not to feel that they can indulge in both.

You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the Lord's table and the table of demons (10:21).

It may be asked how Pauline converts could still be taking part in one of the cultic meals of the mysteries. While Paul might be speaking only theoretically, it must be realized that some of those gentile converts would be coming to Christ from a previous membership in one or more of the pagan cults. In the latter setting, the gods demanded no exclusivity; a person could be initiated into

several cults if he or she wished. That habit and expectation could well have been carried over by some into the new cult they had joined—one which insisted that no other gods even existed, or regarded them as demons. At the head of that passage (10:14), Paul is urging his readers to "shun idolatry." This may well be the apostle urging them to abandon their old commitments to other savior gods.

Such an influx of pagan converts would have been a natural channel of absorption of mystery cult ideas, or an additional influence from them operating within the group. The degree to which Paul could have been in contact with the mysteries, or the extent to which he might have absorbed their ideas, has been hotly debated for a century. Not only was he a Jew of the Diaspora who would have been exposed to cross-cultural influences, he is said to have been from Tarsus (though Paul himself never identifies his home town) which had been the center of the Hellenistic Mithras cult from the end of the 2nd century BCE. (See Ulansey, *op.cit.*, p.40-45.) It is undeniable that the Pauline "Lord's Supper" is alien to Jewish thought. For Geza Vermes (*The Religion of Jesus the Jew*, p. 16) this means it must have been inspired by a non-Jewish source. Hyam Maccoby (*Paul and Hellenism*, p.99) points out that the content of the eucharistic rite in Christianity would have been repugnant—even idolatrous—to Jews, "since it involved the concept of eating the body and drinking the blood of a divine figure." Thus the Eucharist as Paul presents it would have been impossible in the primitive Palestinian church.⁶⁶

On the Night He Was Delivered Up

Is Paul's "Lord's Supper," then, influenced by or derived from the mysteries, and is it, like some of theirs, based on an entirely mythical event?

It was concluded in chapter 4 that Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 11:23, with which he introduces his account of the Lord's Supper, must be interpreted as referring to a personal revelation: "For I received from the Lord what I delivered to you..." The fact that he claims such a source, rather than historical tradition from others, is an indicator that he has indeed introduced something of his own ideas to the rite, and that it is an advance on whatever rite had previously existed in the "church of Judea" he had persecuted. It is thus quite possible that under the influence of examples like the Mithraic sacred meal, and through perceived inspiration, Paul has come up with an origin myth for the Christian communal meal which gives it the sacramental meaning and hallowed significance he wishes to impose on it, if only to get the Corinthians to better comport themselves at table. As for the features of that mythical scene, ancient mythology, as in the Mithraic meal, is full of accounts of gods doing and saying things which have established some rite or practice now being followed. Paul declaring that a spiritual Christ had originated the meal, pronouncing its food and drink as representing his body and blood and directing Christians to make it a memorial to him, would not in itself have been out of the ordinary.

But consider two other elements in the opening verse, as they are often translated:

...that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed (or, arrested), took bread...

The Greek verb for "betrayed" or "arrested" is *paradidomi*, which literally means to "hand over" or "deliver up." This is a term often used in the context of justice or martyrdom, and it means no more than to deliver up to custody or judgment—which could include execution. In the Gospel context it can take on a figurative meaning of arrest or betrayal (as in Mark 14:21), but in Paul there is no need to see it that way. He uses the same verb in Romans 8:32, "He (God) did not spare his own Son, but delivered him up for us all." Here it can hardly imply betrayal or arrest. In Ephesians 5:2 and 25 it is Christ who "gave himself up on your behalf." No thought of Judas or of an arrest would be present here.

As for the scene being set at "night," there is nothing to prevent mythical stories from being given such a setting, especially those involving death and sacrifice. If the Corinthian communal meal is observed after dark (Paul does not specify), the origin myth would likely be set at a corresponding time. Elsewhere, in 1 Corinthians 5:7, Paul links Christ's sacrifice with Passover. Its meal is celebrated after sunset. However, this association could be a symbolic one involving the identification of Christ with the idea of the Passover sacrifice, with no necessary link to a specific historical Passover.

Finally, it could be noted that Paul lacks the one element in his mythical event which might have given it a more clearly historical and earthly character. Unlike the Last Supper scene in the Gospels, no human figures are said to be present. Paul does not portray Jesus as giving these directives *to his disciples*, as the Synoptic evangelists do. The Mithraic myth of the meal shared by Mithras and Helios involved food and drink and a 'table' in the form of the bull's body, yet this is a clearly mythical scene, involving spiritual entities only. We can allot no more nor less to Paul.

A Cult of Parallels

Beginning in the late 19th century, there arose a thread of scholarly research, part of the History of Religions School, which devoted itself to uncovering specific and close correspondences between details of the story of Jesus and elements in the myths of the pagan savior gods and other ancient traditions. Scholarship in the latter 20th century, as part of its reaction against that School, largely dismissed such research as lacking in accuracy and integrity, although it continues to be championed by some mythicist writers and on the Internet. While those pursuits were frequently subject to errors and rushes to judgment, the overall dismissive attitude is unjustified, even if much care and qualification needs to be brought to the investigation of such parallels. One of those nuances is that it need not be claimed that these parallels were a matter of deliberate adoption by Christian innovators and writers (though occasionally it may have been), but rather that with certain common ideas being expressed throughout the religious thinking of the age, Christian adoption and adaptation of them for their own purposes would have been natural and inevitable.

For an extended discussion of this topic, see Appendix 3 (p.664).

Was Earliest Christianity a Jewish Mystery?

It is a popular misconception (though not among knowledgeable scholars) that the Jews in the ancient world were an entirely separate and insulated people, not only in Palestine but in Diaspora communities spread about the empire. They are imagined to have kept the purity of their ethnic religion unsullied and resisted all efforts at assimilation within the Greco-Roman culture and political structure of the time. The later monopoly of Jewish rabbinic dominance, its beliefs and values, is often read back into the pre-Jewish War era. The truth of the matter is that Jewish thought in the earlier period was heavily influenced by Hellenism and that Jews were often embroiled in very non-Jewish enterprises. Charlesworth ("The Concept of the Messiah in the Pseudepigrapha," *ANRW*, 19.1) says:

[I]t is widely recognized (at least in scholarly circles) that intertestamental Judaism was not isolated from the 'pagan' world but deeply influenced by it. We should no longer talk about an orthodox center to Judaism, but rather acknowledge that Judaism during the intertestamental period was a richly varied phenomenon, [p. 193-4]

This acknowledgement removes yet another impediment to recognizing non-Jewish elements in Christianity and accepting that they could be adopted by Jews who moved in more cosmopolitan and adventurous circles.

The Maccabean revolt of the 160s BCE was a reaction to a Hellenizing trend in Jewish society under the overlordship of the Greek Seleucid kings. When Rome arrived on the Judean scene in 63 BCE, pagan influence became even stronger. Jewish society was nowhere near monolithic, with different beliefs held by distinct groups even within the power structure. The fact of widespread gentile conversion to Judaism (the 'Godfearers') inevitably brought in exposure to 'foreign' ways of thinking. Through channels which have yet to be uncovered, a Jewish element became paramount in the syncretistic movement known as Gnosticism. The 'moral historian' Valerius Maximus tells of Jews expelled from Rome in 139 BCE for trying to corrupt the Romans with the cult of Sabazius. Helmut Koester (*op.cit.*, vol.1, p. 195) mentions a perplexing identification in Asia Minor of Sabazius with Yahweh, as well as "a monotheistic mystery cult of the 'God of the Highest' (in which) members observed the Sabbath and certain dietary laws." His opinion is that

It is quite possible that those Jews of Asia Minor who were Hellenized to a large degree had, in the organization of their congregation and in the understanding of their services as mysteries, accepted religious forms that were characteristic for the period....In the later controversies of early Christianity with heretical groups it seems that Christian congregations were also influenced by the same Jewish syncretistic mystery cults.

One of those cults Koester identifies (*op.cit.*, vol.2, p.264-5) as the opponents in Colossians. They were "Jewish-Christian syncretists who wanted to achieve a fresh interpretation of Jewish rites and rules of cultic purity in accord with the

religious thinking of their time, thus adapting the worship of Christ to the general world-view of Hellenism." Jews and Jewish thought could apparently be all over the map, and it leads us to ask a natural question: Can we really think it feasible that the Jews were immune to the juggernaut that was the religious phenomenon of the age known as the mysteries? Every culture around them was formulating some version of that phenomenon, and yet we have no clear example of such a development in any circles of Jewry.

Or do we? The consistent feature that marks the mysteries is the adoption or appointment of some demigod or subordinate deity, preferably from within the culture itself, to serve as a savior god. The closest thing the Jews had on the divine masthead was personified Wisdom, although she was not a suitable candidate for the role. But another figure was very much available: the Messiah. Since the Jews were strongly eschatologically oriented, any prospective savior god would assume an apocalyptic dimension, to be involved in events that were to take place at an anticipated End-time, the traditional "Day of the Lord." All it would have taken would be to change the status of the Messiah from human to divine—in the latter guise he could be pre-existent—and to envision him (with the help of scripture) as a savior figure who, like the gods of the mysteries, had been involved in a 'dying and rising' act which conferred the same sort of benefits as the did the cultic gods. Once that idea arose, scripture could be plumbed to carry it further and to give information about this divine Messiah-Savior (Christ-Jesus). The broader philosophical concept of an intermediary Son, also flowering during this age, who took on the role of revealer and agent of God—one of those tasks being to bring about salvation—would have generated additional power in the formulation of this new religion.

In a sense, Jews or Jewish-influenced gentiles—or more likely a varying combination of both in different centers (one of which would have been Jerusalem)—could be said to have created a new form of cult based partly on a background of ideas common to the mysteries, but with a strong Jewish orientation, though including concepts that were alien to conventional Judaism. (This is not to say that it was centrally organized or started in one specific center.) It would have lacked certain characteristics of the pagan expressions, such as secrecy about the rites, and contained elements derivative of Judaism which the pagan ones did not, such as those linked with specific Jewish covenant theology and apocalyptic expectation. It would also have been enriched with the innovations of particular individuals in the early movement, notably such as Paul. All these factors might render it too simplistic to simply label Christianity a "Jewish mystery religion," but they would enable us to situate this "Christ-Jesus belief" as representing a new expression allied both to the mysteries and to other pagan ideas, and to a Judaism which itself was having an impact on the culture of the ancient world as a whole.

As such, it is probably the best and most dramatic example of religious syncretism available to us in the long history of human interaction and exchange of ideas.

Conceiving the World of Myth

Before the Gospels were introduced, Christianity and its savior deity operated within the general mythical world which the ancients envisioned around them. Subscribing to the principle that the earth was in many ways a mirror of heaven, that heavenly figures could serve as paradigms and champions of groups and nations on earth, that intermediaries between God and humanity were located in intermediate spheres of the universe, the disposition was natural to see the key events of the gods which determined human fate as taking place in a world beyond earth itself—a 'mythical' place. Not in the sense of not existing at all, as the modern colloquial term can imply, but simply in a dimension not our own.

Many philosophers and sectarian groups tried to define the structure and features of that dimension. Detailed pictures of the heavens and what went on in them can be found in many more documents than the ones so far examined. Not all of those details agree, but they all present settings and activities which are similar to those on earth. Perhaps we could coin the word "geomorphism" and apply it to interpreting heaven in earthly terms. We cannot be sure how literally and graphically the ancients envisioned such things as heavenly cities and warring angels. Did the heavenly Jerusalem's streets have literal cobblestones in some kind of equivalent spiritual material? Did the struggling demons Isaiah witnessed in the firmament fight with spiritual swords? We know that some philosophers rejected literality and saw such things as allegory for spiritual processes otherwise indefinable. But the writers of the religious documents we are surveying give us no reason to think they are following that philosophical view—nor do Paul and his fellow cultists. They may not have exercised analytical reason to determine exactly how literally they should understand their heavenly scenarios, but there can be little doubt they conceived that in some way events happened as they presented them.

In such an atmosphere, it is probably safe to assume that the mystery cult myths were carried along by the spirit of the times and were envisioned as taking place in a similarly 'mythical' dimension. But an important distinction must be made here. It is the religious context in which we would expect this transplanting to happen. Most of the savior god myths preceded the formation of the cults that came to surround them, even before they were styled 'savior gods.' What the Hellenistic salvation cults growing out of the old myths brought to them was a new or evolved interpretation of their meaning, a secret understanding which conveyed insight and consequent advantages both in this life and the next.

Outside the cults, even as Platonism came to the fore, the old myths would continue to be spoken of in their traditional ancient or primordial-earth contexts. One did not have to be a devotee of the Osiris cult to know the legends about Osiris. They were as much a part of the cultural milieu as the epics of Homer. An historian like Tacitus, or the 2nd century geographer and travel-writer Pausanias, often had occasion to refer to local and international myths in the Greek catalogue, and they offered no reinterpretation along the lines of Platonism, no transplanting to a heavenly venue, since they were dealing with them on the traditional level. Nor would legends like those of Heracles or the Olympian gods interacting on earth with human beings have undergone a Platonic shift to some spiritual dimension.

But this does not tell us how the myths were understood within the context of the cults that were founded on their raw material. The myth of Egyptian Isis and Osiris had long predated the Hellenistic salvation cult which evolved later. (The native Egyptian cult of Osiris going back into the Old Kingdom was not a "mystery cult" in the later sense of the term, and of course owed nothing to Hellenism or Platonism.) But not everyone knew the *understanding* of that myth as conceived by the Hellenistic cult of Osiris, and any writer not in the latter group, or not choosing to address it—as Plutarch did—would have had no reason to present the myth in any other than the traditional way. In fact, anyone was essentially forbidden to do so.

This is the main reason why we are groping in the dark to try to understand how the savior god myths were conceived *within the cults*. We have virtually no writings of the period on the subject to reflect those conceptions. Plutarch (end of the 1st century) is almost our only source from the turn of the era, and we must work through his personal disposition to render it all allegorical.

Plutarch on Osiris

In *Isis and Osiris*, Plutarch discusses the Egyptian legends on more than one level, sometimes intertwined, although this would indicate some lack of distinction in the myth between what is literally earthbound and what is not. He begins his summary of the Osiris story by relating [355D] certain actions of the gods. These include Hermes "playing at drafts with the moon," winning from her parts of her periods of illumination and casting these as the intercalated five days at the end of the yearly calendar. Such 'events' obviously take place in a non-earthly setting. On the first of those days, Osiris is born, at which time a voice in the heavens issues forth: "The Lord of All advances to the light." Other gods' births are spoken of in a similarly mythical vein, leading us to think that they are not envisioned as taking place on a primordial earth.

Then in contrast [356B], Plutarch casts Osiris as a king of the pre-dynastic era in Egypt, showing his people the fruits of cultivation, giving them laws and teaching them to honor the gods. This is typical primordial-earth myth, placed in a 'sacred time' prior to or at the beginning of history when divine figures gave instruction and established precedents. The traditional tale of Osiris' murder by

Typhon, his dismemberment and the search for the parts of his body by Isis, and so on, is recounted as an earthly event, though with many supernatural overtones.

Following this, however, Plutarch criticizes [358E] those who "hold such opinions and relate such tales about the nature of the blessed and imperishable (in accordance with which our concept of the divine must be framed)..." He is maintaining that the traditional myth represents something occurring in the imperishable heavenly realm, the realm of the divine, although he rejects any *literal* occurrence of such things in that realm, preferring to see them as allegory. But we are not justified in assuming that the general devotee regarded things in the same way, much less that the cult could flourish among the initiated population with a myth that was not to be regarded as actually occurring but served simply as allegory for the unknowable. In fact, Plutarch's very warning to his reader Clea, a priestess at Delphi, that she is not to think that the myths are literally true [355B], indicates that the general public tended to do just that.

Plutarch made the Platonic distinction between the realms of corruptibility and incorruptibility [376D]:

For that part of the world which undergoes reproduction and destruction is contained underneath the orb of the moon, and all things in that are subjected to motion and to change, through the four elements: fire, earth, water and air.

Typhon, a Satan-like figure who represents the activity of evil, operates in the area near the orbit of the moon, for he is said to "force his way in and seize upon the outermost areas...for the destructive power exercises special dominion over the outermost part of matter..." [375A-B]. Moreover, it is there that "we may conceive of (Isis) as seeming sad, and spoken of as mourning, and that she seeks for the remains and scattered members of Osiris and arrays them, receiving and hiding away the things perishable." In other words, Plutarch has located the myth's activities in the 'outermost part of matter'—below the moon. But again, that he rejects those activities as literal does not mean that less philosophically oriented minds did the same. Nor were those minds precluded from locating such activities, even if they regarded them as literal, in the same non-earthly sphere.

Plutarch has previously alluded to such a non-earthly setting for the Isis-Osiris myth [373A]:

It is not, therefore, out of keeping that they [the Egyptians] have a legend that the soul of Osiris is everlasting and imperishable, but that his body Typhon oftentimes dismembers and causes to disappear, and that Isis wanders hither and yon in her search for it, and fits it together again; for that which really is and is perceptible and good is superior to destruction and change.

In contradistinction to the earlier legendary activities of Osiris as king of Egypt in primordial times, here the acts of the cultic myth itself are said to be repeated, which removes it from any earthly setting. The essence of Osiris, his spirit-soul, inhabits the "everlasting and imperishable," the upper heavens, but his "body" descends to the lower heavens to undergo the death and regeneration, things which can only take place in the realm of "destruction and change." Such

a "body," repeatedly undergoing dismemberment, cannot be regarded as an incarnated human one, and must thus be intended as a heavenly equivalent *within that realm of change below the moon*. In 364F Plutarch refers to "the accounts of the dismemberment of Osiris and his revivification and regeneration." These things, too, are 'events' that are repeated, the latter being tantamount to resurrection, and thus the entirety of the legend is seen as operating in a spiritual dimension. Here we have an almost exact equivalent to the mythicist view of a Pauline Christ who descended to the lower part of the heavens, took on "flesh" and underwent death and rising.

E. R. Goodenough (*By Light, Light*, p. 14-15) sees the way in which Plutarch handles the Isis/Osiris myth as reflective of the mystic's search for spiritual ascent, achieving the sought-for union with God. Such mystical views were part of the Platonic structure of the universe. A short time after Plutarch, the novelist Apuleius talks about the rites of Isis in *The Golden Ass*. In the 'permissible' report he gives the reader on his introduction into those rites, he says:

I entered the presence of the gods of the under-world, and the gods of the upper-world, stood near and worshiped them.

These gods and demigods exist in the 'now' and are described in terms of their present manifestations within a Platonic cosmology. Apuleius was a devotee of the mysteries who seems to have subscribed to the outlook of his time in conceiving the activities of gods in various layers of the invisible upper world.

Later Philosophers on the Myths

As we saw in connection with descending gods (chapter 10), the 4th century philosophers Sallustius and emperor Julian also placed the cultic myths in the upper world. Sallustius regards the myths, similar to Plutarch, as allegories of "timeless processes." Julian renders things a little more graphically, but he too would probably not have imputed a strict literalness to his treatment of the savior gods. In his *Orations V: Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* (165C; Loeb, p.461), he speaks of the descent of Attis to a level of the heavens described this way:

For it is there, they say, that the substance which is subject to change mingles with the passionless revolving sphere of the fifth substance.

Julian's Neoplatonic philosophy envisioned an intermediate layer of the universe in which divine beings or essences take on the characteristics of the material world; it was a sphere of overlap. Julian goes on to suggest that other elements of the myth of Attis represent characteristics that are even closer to the material world, and yet even this "does not mean matter itself, but the lowest non-material cause which subsists prior to matter." This area of the universe is "the connecting link between forms embodied in matter beneath the moon" and "the cause that is set over matter." He also styles Attis as a demigod who "seems to lean and incline toward matter," being lower than the "unchanging gods." All of this suggests an intermediate sphere where subordinate gods can get close to the material world and do things which have an impact upon it.

This is highly esoteric stuff, almost unintelligible to the modern mind—and, of course, totally unreflective of actual reality—which only the philosopher may have thought to understand. But it does demonstrate how the orientation of the cultic myths was toward an activity in the heavens, revolving around Platonic images of the universe. It tells us that in philosophical circles, and from the time of Plutarch, an application of the myths to a primordial earth setting was no longer in vogue. This may or may not give us a definite picture of how all the devotees of the cults looked upon such things, but it demonstrates that the thinking of the era had moved in an upward direction, and we have no contrary evidence to suggest that the interpretation of the myths in the cults as a whole did not follow. (Nor can we reject the likelihood that the initial Christ cult would have followed suit as well.)

In contrast with the philosophers, however, it can hardly be thought that the entire membership of the cults, even if following their lead into the upper world, went so far as to reduce the myths to pure allegory, things that never happened as described. The priests and even some male devotees of Attis literally castrated themselves, amputating their genitalia in a fit of devotional frenzy, this in emulation of Attis himself whose myth had him performing the original act. Would something viewed as mere allegory have been capable of prompting such an imitation? Would the average Christian today be willing or capable of seeing all the biblical accounts, including the story of Jesus, as nothing but allegory? Could stigmata be psychologically inducible by a crucifixion tradition seen as mere symbolism? The cults were vibrant for centuries, indulged in by millions who based their hopes for salvation and a happy afterlife upon them. On earth or in the heavens, the heart and soul of the cults must have viewed the myths as literal, as genuine actions of the gods worshiped and in whom so much was invested, including on an emotional level. The same is undoubtedly true of Paul, who gives no indication that he regarded the story of the acts of Jesus, extracted from scripture, as merely symbolic of hidden spiritual truths. His emotional response to Christ cannot be understood unless he envisioned his Savior undergoing a literal suffering and death in the heavenly dimension.

It was Christianity which later took the decisive and unique step of turning spiritual world acts into literal earthly history, not primordial but recent, supposedly recorded in oral and written traditions of a man still remembered. Paul's emotional response to a spiritual redeemer was now directed earthward. As Ignatius insisted, against those who apparently thought otherwise, Jesus Christ had to have been *truly* persecuted under Pontius Pilate, *truly* raised from the dead in our own physical dimension. And everything from that point became changed.

How Literal was the Mythical World?

One of the impediments to a modern acceptance of a Platonic interpretation of the Pauline Christ, as well as the myths of the pagan savior gods, is the inability of our scientific and literal-oriented minds to encompass the idea of the

world of myth where apparently human-seeming activities could be seen as taking place. One dissenter on the Freethought Rationalist Discussion Board (formerly the Internet Infidels) put it quite bluntly:

Christ couldn't be crucified or buried there since there was nothing to crucify him on and bury him in....there is no record of a belief of being in the flesh above the earth and below the firmament, nor of any actions like crucifixion on such people.

We will address the specific point about "being in the flesh" in a separate chapter to follow. But the question of heavenly trees and ground gets to the heart of the present matter, as an expression of modern literality and the inability to comprehend the ancient mind's view of the universe. Here we can look at some examples of pictures that were presented of goings-on in the spiritual realm. As before, the great majority of these are from Jewish sectarianism of the intertestamental period, with no explicit descriptions coming down to us from pagan writings about the cosmology of the mystery cult myths. None will give us as much pertinent detail as did the Ascension of Isaiah, but all of them present activities which are undeniably 'geomorphic' yet in a spirit-world context. We can also remark on the variety of conception about the structure of that context.

The Enochian pre-Christian writings envision all sorts of activities in the various layers of heaven. There one can see fire and ice, armies and chariots. In a place that is outside heaven itself, "an empty place...neither a heaven above nor an earth below" (1 Enoch, 21:1-2), even stars that have transgressed God—indicating a belief that the stars were divine entities—are bound and confined. Elsewhere lies a "prison house of the angels" (21:10). According to 2 Enoch 7, in the second heaven there are prisoners hanging and awaiting judgment. Paradise itself is in the third heaven. There are mountains and rivers in these heavens, and trees. 2 Enoch envisions fourth and fifth heavens. The former contains the orbits of the sun and moon (the moon being out of usual sequence); the latter imprisons giants who are the "sons of God" of Genesis 6 who had sex with the "daughters of men." In the sixth and seventh heavens are ranks of angels, with God and his throne in the latter, although one manuscript of 2 Enoch has him in a tenth heaven. We can be sure that none of this is allegorical. These documents are particularly chaotic, but the variety and inventiveness of thought gives us a window onto the conception of a multifarious universe in which just about anything could be envisioned as happening in the spirit world—including the crucifixion or hanging on a tree of a descending Son at the hands of demon spirits.

In the Apocalypse of Zephaniah (probably 1st century CE), a seer is brought up into the heavens in a vision. There he sees angels wearing diadems and sitting on thrones. While not of material substance, there is no reason not to assume that such geomorphic artifacts in heaven (which appear all over the tradition) were regarded as having a literal reality in some kind of spiritual substance. In the same or a different layer of heaven, the seer witnesses a soul being punished by five thousand angels. The [damaged] text says:

They took it to the East and they brought it to the West. They beat its [...] they gave it a hundred [...] lashes for each one daily. I was afraid and I cast myself upon my face so that my joints dissolved.

Presumably, heavenly whips were being used by the angels to beat the deceased being punished.

Clearly—and apocalyptic writings (including Revelation) are full of such things—the writers of these texts are presenting visions of heavenly realities which they regard as actual; they are not fashioning visions of allegories. While Paul provides us with no graphic visions or descriptions pertaining to Christ's death at the hands of the rulers of this age (although he may have alluded to such a thing in Galatians 3:1), the New Testament Epistle to the Hebrews does give us a fairly detailed and graphic description of Christ's sacrifice of his blood in the heavenly sanctuary. As will be seen when we come to examine this document, scholars divide their interpretations between acknowledging that the writer regards this scenario as literally taking place in heaven, and attempting to neuter it all as simply an (undeclared) metaphor for something on earth.

A somewhat similar scenario to the Apocalypse of Zephaniah is envisioned by Plutarch, in his "On the Delay of Divine Justice" in which he is attempting to explain and justify the fact that punishment for evildoers in this world is often delayed, even into the next. A certain Arideus is carried in a vision to a higher realm among vast stars. Within that realm are caverns and trees and flowers. From the earth below "the souls of the dying rose like fiery bubbles through the parted air," emerging as diminutive human forms. These are judged and subjected to punishments according to their guilt, mainly scourgings. These are meted out to the 'bodies' which the arriving souls still bear, for only a body could feel pain and punishment, not the soul. It is not clear if this body is the same material one the soul had lived in on earth, or a spiritual substitute for the purposes of judgment; but we can recognize a parallel here to the concept that the descending Christ had to take on some bodily substance resembling matter—a form of "flesh"—in order to undergo his sacrificial death in the lower heavens.

Greco-Roman society had a form of literature known as the *Hermetica*. This purported to be divinely-revealed knowledge about a variety of topics from astrology to magic to moral philosophy, the product of the god of wisdom, Hermes Trismegistus ("thrice-great"). The texts are associated with the Egypt of the first few centuries CE, though they are no doubt redacted from earlier elements. (The collection known as the "*Corpus Hermeticum*" was assembled in Byzantine times.) They have no points of contact with Christianity. They are akin to the general categories of wisdom literature and visionary experiences in which a seer is given secret knowledge by a divinity. Usually taking the form of a dialogue between teacher (Hermes) and initiate, they resemble the Gnostic post-resurrection dialogues in which Jesus imparts wisdom to his disciples. Even the Gospels, in their private explanations and dialogues between Jesus and the disciples, are another expression of this common literary approach to wisdom teaching. The Christian collectors (as at the monastery associated with Nag

Hammadi) who included these works in their library regarded them, true to form, as foreshadowings of the true Christian theology.

The Gnostic documents discovered at Nag Hammadi include a few Hermetic works, one of which is a Greek portion of the "Asclepius" otherwise known in Latin. Here, the god Hermes tells the initiate Asclepius about the fate of souls at judgment in the heavens (76/77):

There is a great demon. The great God has appointed him to be overseer or judge over the souls of men. And God has placed him in the middle of the air between the earth and heaven. Now, when the soul comes forth from the body, it is necessary that it meet this daimon....And that soul [being punished] has been put neither on the earth nor in heaven. But it has come into the open sea of the air of the world, the place where there is a great fire, and crystal water, and furrows of fire, and a great upheaval. The bodies are tormented in various ways. Sometimes they are cast upon raging waters; at other times they are cast down into the fire in order that it may destroy them.

In this 'revelation' the equivalent to Sheol or Hades is located in the air between earth and heaven (presumably below the moon). A demon operates there to inflict suffering on the 'bodies' of the dead, using fire and water.

All these visionary understandings of heavenly activities on the part of spiritual entities present us with a broad conceptual 'world of myth' into which not only the savior god tales as interpreted in the mysteries could have been fitted, but the activities of Jesus in the early Christ cult. Even in standard Greek mythology about the Olympian gods and goddesses, the earlier and more primitive concept that they lived on and acted from Mount Olympus in Greece was hardly retained literally. Olympus became a mythical place in the heavens, and interaction between the gods themselves became heavenly activities, even if there was a certain amount of allegorizing of those activities by intellectuals. We have talked about specified layers of the universe and the principle of above and below the moon, but this was the product of minds seeking to impose organization on chaos. The average person would not have required that degree of specificity.

We must also keep in mind that the ancients had not developed the scientific knowledge of the universe to give them the same sort of space-time concepts that we have. The average person today knows the extent and details of our planet and of the universe in general. We have a grasp of how the laws of nature work and where everything is located, and we think in those terms. For the ancients, however, much of the world around them was mysterious; fantastic views of reality abounded. More was unknown and unseen and misunderstood than the opposite. The ancient mind would have had no reason to think that such-and-such was impossible, that certain things could not exist and go on in the unseen spiritual realm. If gods lived in the upper part of the universe, there was no impediment to thinking that they could do things there. Since the gods were essentially anthropomorphic, it was feasible that they could do anthropomorphic things in geomorphic circumstances.

Religion of the Stars

One of the phenomena of the era was astral religion. As David Ulansey puts it (*Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries*, p.80): "For in addition to their commitment to astrology in general, the Stoics professed a kind of astral piety in which the astronomical cosmos was viewed as being a living, divine power." Aristotle maintained that the "regularity of the daily rotation of the sphere of the fixed stars was proof that it was in fact the highest divinity." Gnosticism, an amalgam of pagan and Jewish esoterica with various points of contact with Christianity, was fixated on understanding the structure of the Godhead (the Pleroma—"fullness"—of the heavenly hierarchy of gods, or emanations of the highest God) inhabiting the heavens. Modern astrology is a descendant of this kind of astral religion, only today it is treated as the effects of impersonal planetary forces; for the ancients, the stars and planets controlled human destiny because they were in effect gods themselves, personal beings, and exercised that control consciously over the movements and functioning of the heavens and the lives of humans.

A heavenly location for the actions of the savior gods, including the death of Christ, would also have been influenced by most religions' ultimate derivation from astrotheology, as in the worship of sun and moon. For this dimension of more remote Christian roots, see the books of Acharya S, especially *Suns of God*.

In his introduction to the gnostic *Eugnostos the Blessed*, a work regarded as pre-Christian, Douglas M. Parrott states (*Nag Hammadi Library*, p.220):

The main intent of *Eugnostos* appears to be to assert and describe the existence of an invisible, supercelestial region beyond the visible world.... Ruling that region is a hierarchy of five principal divine beings: Unbegotten Father [the highest God]; his reflection, called Self-Father; Self-Father's hypostatized power [called] Immortal Man, who is androgynous; Immortal Man's androgynous son, Son of Man; and Son of Man's androgynous son, the Savior. [In a later reworking of this document as "The Sophia of Jesus Christ," the fifth of these is turned into the figure of Jesus of Nazareth who teaches gnostic doctrine to his disciples.] These divine beings each have their own sphere or aeon....*Eugnostos* shows the influence of the transcendent realm upon this world."

The gods of this transcendent realm possess thrones, temples, dwellings and chariots. These spheres are said to have provided the "types" for "likenesses" in subordinate worlds. Other gnostic documents to be examined in a later chapter also have Savior figures similarly unconnected with the Christian Jesus who operate in a world which is part of the mythical dimension, but with geomorphic features.

There are echoes of this outlook on astral deities in the Pauline corpus, and again, it is perhaps not a coincidence that Paul is said to have been from Tarsus, a center of Stoic astral religion and the probable origin point of the Mithras cult.

During our minority, we were slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe.
[Gal. 4:3]

For our citizenship is in the heavens, from where we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly bodies to be like his body of glory, by means of the power he exercises to bring everything under his control. [Phil. 3:20-21]

There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies; but the glory of the heavenly bodies is of one sort, and the glory of the earthly bodies another. There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars, for star differs from star in glory. [1 Cor. 15:40-41]

In the latter passage, we can note that Paul uses the word "body" in a non-material sense, and he will go on to speak of Christ's "spiritual body" in heaven. For Paul, Christ is a heavenly savior who from his position in the heavens controls various powers and forces in the universe (compare the common designation of the Son as the sustainer of the universe, as in the hymn of Colossians 1:15-20 and Hebrews 1:3).

In the Galatians verse quoted above, the Greek word for "elemental spirits" is *"stoicheia."* While it sometimes means elemental principles of knowledge, as in Hebrews 5:12, it can also mean the natural elements (fire, air, earth, water) which had spirits associated with them. More importantly, it can refer to the heavenly bodies of the stars and planets which, as noted earlier, were seen as constituting or associated with divine entities or even evil spirits. The debate over what Paul means by this term, and that of Colossians 2:8 and 20, has never been settled (New Testament translations and lexicons are split on the matter), perhaps because modern scholarship is reluctant to impute to Paul and other early Christians this sort of unenlightened primitive belief, even though it was a familiar one in his day. And yet, an understanding of being enslaved by such heavenly spirits would fit the general conception in the epistles and other writings that the earth and fate of humanity was in the hands of the evil "powers and authorities" (as in Eph. 6:12) who sought to interfere with access to Heaven and salvation; they were, in fact, in control of all beneath them until God through a savior would bring about their destruction. It also fits well with the interpretation that "the rulers of this age" refers to the demons in the heavens.

The Mythical Mindset

There are those who would maintain that the quest for precision, trying to open up the ancient mind and extract from it some literal or rational application of its mythology, is simply the imposition of our modern sense of organization on conceptions which do not require or even lend themselves to such things. It may not be a coincidence that we possess no texts from within the cultic circles, regardless of the imposition of secrecy. The very practice of composing texts describing mystical beliefs about gods and spirits—or attempting to—would have imposed an artificial specificity and definition which may not have existed in the minds and practices of the sect. This is especially true in the pagan, polytheistic milieu; any need to explain and define would have been felt largely by the philosophers only, not the average believer. Even the traditional religious

myths which took shape in ancient society tended to be chaotic and lacking any sense of what we would call the rational and comprehensible (for example, Dionysos born from Zeus' thigh). Yet such features were still looked upon as 'real,' however illogical they may seem to us; they were allegorized only by the intelligentsia. If pressed, average devotees might have been mightily exercised to define exactly how they saw the stories of Attis, Dionysos and Mithras unfolding in their world of myth, let alone to provide an exact location for them.

The prime exception to this situation existed in 'mainstream' Judaism. It alone was a text-oriented religion, with a long tradition of translating its spiritual experiences and understandings into presumed history, written down and reworked by an established scribal community. Even in Jewish sectarian circles, this is no doubt why we find a good number of documents in which attempts have been made to describe just how things happen in the mythical heavenly dimension. A certain amount of chaos and irrationality is still present, of course, but they have tried to impose some kind of organization upon it.

Since the triumph of Christianity, we have grown up in a world of imposed governing authority where religion and its interpretation is concerned, giving us a propensity to demand the same thing of the older ancient mindset. Uniformity became an obsession as part of the Church's strategy of controlling an empire-wide faith community. Uniformity requires organization and explanations for the inherent irrationality of most religious belief; it is essential to have written texts on which a consensus understanding can be imposed (though it has to be flexible enough to change with the times and adapt to human intellectual progress).

In contrast, the ancient mystery cults were much more free-wheeling, existing in an atmosphere of non-exclusivity. There were many paths to understanding reality and acquiring a guarantee of personal salvation. A strict understanding of the workings of such religious beliefs was not imposed, and thus the need to define and interpret would not have been strong. Indeed, translating the ritual experience and insight into the mere words of a text would have too narrowly limited its understanding, robbing it of its richness and diversity, its power to inspire and evolve and to appeal to all. The last thing it needed was to be specifically located in time and space. In the initiation rite the officiant guided the initiates, but they were also expected to gain their own insight through the power of the experience itself. That insight was to be intuitively grasped, not rationally dissected, let alone imposed and regulated.

Christianity would change all that. Personal freedom became anathema. The Christian was forbidden to exercise his own mind, required to unquestioningly accept imposed dogma and literal understanding. (The penalty for taking proscribed liberties could be the stake). But in the literature of the early Christ cult the worst of that repressive spirit has not yet come into play. While opponents are condemned, Paul seeks to inspire agreement and insight largely through the persuasiveness of his own arguments and mystical experiences. One also suspects that if he does not focus on an overly specific description of a heavenly cosmology, it is because his world of myth, having one foot in the

pagan camp, has not been as heavily literalized as some of the Jewish sectarian pictures we find in documents like the Ascension of Isaiah.

When the original primordial myths of the mysteries were impacted by Platonic cosmology, by theories of heavenly counterparts to earthly things (an idea around even before Plato), adaptation would have been the order of the day. If the myth of Osiris came to be shifted from earth to the heavens, the devotees of a religious outlook around for millennia were not likely to decide it no longer made sense that Osiris could be dismembered and buried in pieces. Where in heaven was a dismemberment instrument to be procured, where the boxes, where was the ground in which the parts of Osiris were interred? We know that some minds decided it was all allegory. But others no doubt dismissed (or were ignorant of) rational concerns; they adopted the stance that the heavens constituted a different reality and that somehow such things took place there. Or they simply accepted that it was a "mystery" which could not be explained.

Such adaptation can be seen in our own time and religious history. We now know that events in the early days of the world did not unfold as Genesis recounts. Yet part of the population insists on believing that they did, while others judge those accounts to be symbolic. We know now that Heaven is not in the sky or Hell in a subterranean part of the earth. However, few believers will reject them outright; for many, they have become spiritualized. Yet somehow, even in that spiritual dimension, as preachers insist every day, fire and pain torture the damned in Hell. Should such concepts not be rejected on the basis that fire and pain cannot exist in a non-material dimension? Is it fire and pain of a spirit-world equivalent? (Do Satan's devils use spiritual pitchforks?) No priest or theologian can tell us definitively, but it does not stop many of them from believing such things and inflicting them on vulnerable Christians. I suggest that the same situation existed in the ancient world in regard to the suffering and death of the savior gods, including Christ Jesus, in a spiritual dimension. The committed believer has always found some way to accommodate traditional or desired beliefs, even if he or she can no longer rationally understand them.

One can always take refuge in Paul's safely net: the wisdom of God makes the wisdom of the world look foolish (1 Cor. 1:20); just as one of Lee Strobel's interviewees in *The Case for Christ*, Dr. Gary Collins, declared that he believed demons existed and caused sickness essentially because the Gospels declared they did. We do not need to understand or support with evidence, we need simply to have faith. Religious belief does not come to a crashing halt because its irrationality is exposed. Neither does the spiritual world it is dependent upon collapse when it is demonstrated not to be a working scientific hypothesis. Just as modern believers can continue to accommodate the traditional spiritual dimension despite advances in our knowledge of the universe which would rule out such a thing, Paul and the early Christians could accommodate a world of myth where the gods acted out their purposes. Even if there was little or no rational consideration given to how it actually worked, or whether there were trees and nails available in that spiritual world for a crucifixion.

Dancing with Katie Sarka Under the Moon

The title of this chapter is the title I gave to a discussion thread on the Freethought Rationalist "Biblical Criticism & History" forum in 2005. The humorous touch was an attempt to inject a bit of levity into a somewhat esoteric subject, indeed the central feature of mythicism's alternative to a human Jesus of Nazareth crucified on earth, as presented in the original edition of *The Jesus Puzzle*. This feature has generated the most controversy and objection, becoming the main point of attack for dissenters and apologists.

The present chapter will address the New Testament epistles' pervasive use of the word "flesh" (*sarx*)—along with related words like "body" (*soma*)—in association with Jesus, and how such language is to be understood in the context of his heavenly act of sacrifice. While there are certain similarities between the treatment of Jesus' death and parallels in non-Christian thinking, particularly in regard to the savior gods of the mysteries, the use of the term "flesh"—as far as one can tell from the evidence—seems to be unique to Christian writers. It may represent their own language developed to describe the myth of redemption by the spiritual Christ. As we have seen, non-Christian documents speak about spiritual entities and humans after death acting in heavenly realms, using anthropomorphic and geomorphic terminology, but this does not include use of the word "*sarx*." Consequently, internal Christian evidence must be drawn on to indicate the meaning of such language for people like Paul, with a special focus on the phrase "*kata sarka*."

We have examined the dualistic world of Platonic philosophy, its higher and lower dimensions, its layers of spiritual and material and the entities inhabiting each, as well as the forces operating between them. We have seen that even apart from Platonism, the ancient world, including Judaism, had a concept of things existing in heaven which were the counterpart to things on earth. And what went on in the spiritual world had its effects and guarantees on those who inhabited the material one. Across the great divide between them, saviors and saved shared, communicated, interacted.

While reference can be found to the divide between spirit and flesh, between incorruptibility and corruptibility, there is in this context no reference to the moon in Paul or any of the other epistles of the New Testament. But we have seen that Paul subscribed to the idea of multiple layers of heaven. And in the

Greek Septuagint, and increasingly in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, there is a clear distinction between the realm of spirit and the realm of flesh, between the spheres of heaven and earth. So we know it was a widespread idea even in Jewish circles (see the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. VII, p.119f). Several Jewish sectarian writings have been examined which offer a wealth and variety of divine activity going on in the spheres of heaven.

But a universally agreed-upon systemization of any of the ideas of the ancient world never existed. One school's or philosopher's views might gain prominence and adherents, but Gnosticism is a good example of riotous and uncoordinated variations on a theme. Thus we cannot be sure how Paul or early Christianity in general conformed to various Middle Platonic and biblical concepts. As noted, there was no central organizing control over such things, whether in Platonic or Jewish thought. Quite clearly, ideas developed and mutated, they were subject to change under many influences and internal necessities. This can be seen in the proliferation of documents and the multitude of amendments to those documents, even within the Christian record. Whether Paul's Christ danced with Katie Sarka under the moon, or at some other heavenly prom, we cannot be sure.

A Dualistic Language

The early Christians needed a language to describe all these goings-on, the different realms in which humans and divinities operated, their respective natures and the relationships between them. They adapted the language of the world around them which reflected humanity, gods and the universe. It was a dualistic terminology: matter and spirit, earthly and heavenly, and—most important for our context—flesh and spirit: in Greek, "*sarx*" and "*pneuma*." "Flesh" was particularly apropos, for the concepts of corruptibility, suffering and death were directly associated with human flesh; matter itself was also "changeable." In moral thinking, as Paul's obsessions show, it was flesh that was weak and degenerate, it was flesh that was susceptible to lusts; whereas it was the "spirit" that was pure, the essential quality of divinity. So where religion was concerned, flesh and spirit would naturally comprise the polar opposites, whatever the cosmological setting. Spirit would save flesh since flesh could not save itself; flesh would be purified and exalted to spirit. Sometimes it was "body" that was used in the contrast. In some contexts, Paul freely interchanges body (*soma*) with flesh (*sarx*). At the same time, we find that the words "body" and "flesh" could be used in heavenly settings as well, referring to kinds of 'spiritual body' and 'spiritual flesh.'

"Flesh" thus became an adaptable word that could be used in all manner of ways to do with humans and divinities, on earth and in heaven. Since the counterpart relationship between human and god involved the latter assuming a form of the former so as to undergo parallel experiences to humans (suffering and death), this brought him into the realm of flesh (below the moon, as some envisioned it) and into the shape of flesh—a "likeness" of it, a spiritual counterpart of it. The sacrificed divinity then reversed the process by rising from

death and being exalted (justified, vindicated) back into his higher form and realm of spirit, to which the human devotees were then guaranteed to follow in parallel. So Paul tells us in Romans 6:5 (cf. Ephesians 2:6).

The language commonly used throughout the early Christian literature to refer to the lower realm into which the deity descended, or the state which he assumed there, or the sphere associated with or affected by his activities, centered on the word "*sarx*," flesh, in such phrases as: "*kata sarka*," literally, "according to the flesh"; "*en sarki*" or just "*sarki*" by itself, "in flesh." It is frequently claimed that usage of the word *sarx* can only refer to human flesh, flesh on earth, or the realm of earth itself which flesh inhabits. But this is erroneous.

In its most recent edition, Bauer's lexicon [2000, p.915, def. 3.b] recognizes that *sarx* can refer to the flesh "of transcendent entities...(to) flesh other than human...i.e., of divine messengers who take on *sarx* when they appear to humans" (as in Genesis or Homer). It was earlier noted that the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (VII, p. 127) identifies the demon spirits as possessing bodies which comprised some form and substance similar to flesh, but a more 'spiritual' version of it—something invisible when such spirits approached or came in contact with humans. Angels, too, have 'corporeality.' They "have flesh or at least appear to have it" (p. 143, n.340), and Jude 7 refers to the "different flesh" of Lot's angelic visitors, a flesh lusted after by the men of Sodom.

In Greco-Roman thought we encounter similar ideas. In *On the Nature of the Gods* (Bk. I, 149), Cicero concludes that

the gods themselves have human shape. This shape is not a body, but analogous to a body. It has no blood, but something analogous to blood.

We can equate this—though the context is different—with references to the "blood" and "flesh/body" of Christ in Paul's usage of such terms in non-human, mystical ways. Cicero himself argues that humans tend to see the gods in "fleshly" forms and characteristics, prompted by "nature and our reason." Thus, it would have been natural for early Christians as well to interpret the spiritual Christ in similar anthropomorphic terms. If they were pressed for a word which would identify the realm and nature of the region into which the Christ would descend, the state he would assume upon entering it, and the relationship he then bore to those he had come to save, "flesh" would have been a natural choice, even if he did not assume actual human flesh and walk the surface of the earth.

Pagan writers seem not to have used "flesh" (*sarx*) when talking about the nature of the gods, but it must be stated once again that we have virtually no exegetical literature about the mystery cults and their savior deities, and it would be only in the context of such religious beliefs that we could expect to find language similar to that which Christians used when speaking of *their* savior deity. Thus, the demand by dissenters for examples of such parallel language outside Christianity is unrealistic.

Overview

Before looking at the texts themselves, a few general principles. We need to stress variety, or to put it more technically, 'semantic range.' "Flesh" is a general term used in the epistles to refer to things human, from literal human flesh or a human being, to human attitudes and behavior. By extension, it may refer to the world humans live in. Thus it can be used both literally and figuratively. As well, it can be used with a neutral tone or with derogatory associations, the latter being by far the more numerous in the New Testament.

The word "flesh" is also applied to Christ, first in descriptions of him, both in a 'literal' and mystical context. Paul sometimes speaks of Christ's flesh in ways that could never be interpreted as referring to a human Jesus of Nazareth on earth; they are to some metaphysical, supernatural dimension of Christ—and not merely in a metaphorical way. Paul can also speak of Christ's "body" (*soma*) in a similar manner. At first glance, these terms may seem interchangeable, but the fact is that Christ's "flesh" and "body" are almost exclusively used each in its own differentiated context, and this in itself is illuminating.

Second, the word "flesh" is also used to refer to one side of a relationship between humans and Christ, between the physical and the spiritual, between the realm of earthly flesh and the realm of heavenly spirit. Thus it does not refer to Christ's own "flesh" per se, but to the relationship he has to the world of humans, the affect he has upon it. This distinction between my first and second categories in regard to Christ is an important one, without which some confusion can arise. It is like the difference between saying that Mr. Smith is a political animal versus saying that he has entered and influences the political field. The first describes Mr. Smith's personal nature, the second describes the area and the people that he relates to and has an effect upon. The two thoughts are linked, of course (though not in every case fully overlapping), but there is nothing unusual in a word, phrase or concept applying in a number of ways and from a number of different angles.

Thus, "flesh" as used in the epistles is a term that spans heaven and earth, humans and divinities, the literal and the non-literal. It can describe relationships between humans, and between humans and Christ. Considering the thought-world Paul moved in, "*sarx*" was a key element of the language he used to express his ideas. It has been observed that the early epistles' use of the language of *sarx* is somewhat unusual, even unnatural to our minds. It sounds stereotyped, stilted—especially when used of Jesus—when one would think that there should have been other, more diverse and natural ways to say the variety of things which "*sarx*" is so consistently used to describe.

But that would be true only in the context of a Christ who had lived on earth, and about whom things could indeed have been said which were more natural and straightforward, things better suited to a movement which owed its genesis to a recent historical figure and its ongoing inspiration and guidance to memories of his life. When we examine the language as a whole, however, and understand the variety and scope being used in its portrayal of early Christian cosmology

and the relationship between humanity and divinity, the apparent awkwardness disappears. Instead, we can see it as natural and vital within its own view of reality.

Flesh in the Realm of Flesh

If "flesh" is being used to describe Christ's inferior or degraded spiritual form when he descended into the firmament and was crucified by the demon spirits, it is perfectly in keeping with Paul's outlook on the world in general. Almost everything to do with the realm of flesh possessed for him only negative and derogatory associations. Only rarely is it presented in a neutral way, and never positively. Flesh was something in which sin, suffering and death existed, something containing a physical nature and impulses that needed to be suppressed in oneself, something ultimately to escape from. To be in a human 'likeness' when he entered such a realm, Christ could do no other than take on some form of 'flesh.'

We can start with a few passages which do not involve Christ, but only humans and the earthly sphere. The words in bold are a translation of the Greek words in italics. Note that *sarx*, "flesh," is the basic form of the word, in the nominative case. The phrase *en sarki* is translated "in flesh," with the preposition putting the word into the dative case, though sometimes *sarki* can appear without the preposition. *Kata sarka* is the phrase most challenging. Here the word is in the accusative case, following the preposition *kata*. The standard literal translation "according to the flesh" is woolly and allows a number of possible meanings. The odd quote in this chapter has the word in the genitive case, *sarkos*. Unlike English, Greek is an "inflected" language in which noun and adjective endings—"cases"—change according to usage.

A. Some usages are more or less literal, referring to the human body or human life, such as:

- 2 Cor 12:7-1 was given a thorn **in my flesh** (*te sarki*).
- 1 Cor 7:28 - Those who marry will face many troubles **in this life** (*te sarki*).

B. Often it refers to humanity in general, or a race:

- Rom 3:20 - Not by works of the Law will **flesh** (*sarx*) be justified in God's sight.
- 1 Cor 10:18 - Consider the Jewish people [lit., Israel **according to the flesh**] (*kata sarka*).

C. It can illustrate relationships, such as between humans:

- Rom 4:1 - Abraham, our forefather **according to the flesh** (*kata sarka*)

D. Frequently it refers to the ways and standards of the world:

- 1 Cor 1:26 - Not many of you were wise, **by any human/worldly standard** (*kata sarka*). [Compare 2 Corinthians 5:16]
- Rom 8:4 - ...that the law may be fulfilled in us who walk [i.e., conduct ourselves] not **according to the flesh** (*kata sarka*), but **according to the spirit** (*kata pneuma*).

E. Often it refers disparagingly to human nature in its perceived baser interests:

- Rom 7:18-1 know that nothing good lives in me, **in my flesh** (*en te sarki mou*).

- Rom 8:13 - If you live **according to the flesh** (*kata sarka*), you will die.

The last example shows that being in flesh was also a state of mind, relating to one's moral behavior and spiritual condition. It was something one could leave, even though one was obviously still in one's physical body. As one can see, the Pauline usage of *sarx* could be literal or figurative, neutral or (in most cases) negative.

Next we can list some key usages of *sarx* involving Christ (some outside the Pauline corpus). First let me quote from Richard Carrier's 2002 review of *The Jesus Puzzle*, as published on the Internet Infidels,⁶⁷ where he addresses my usage of *sarx* and particularly the phrase "*kata sarka*":

Central to Doherty's thesis is his reinterpretation of the nature of the Incarnation as held by the earliest Christians (including Paul and some other epistle authors), such as by rereading the strange yet oft-repeated reference to *kata sarka*, "according to the flesh" (as usually translated)...The actual phrase used, *kata sarka*, is indeed odd if it is supposed to emphasize an earthly sojourn. The preposition *kata* with the accusative literally means "down" or "down to" and implies motion, usually over or through its object, hence it literally reads "down through flesh" or "down to flesh" or even "towards flesh." It very frequently, by extension, means "at" or "in the region of," and this is how Doherty reads it. It only takes on the sense "in accordance with" in reference to fitness or conformity (via using *kata* as "down to" a purpose rather than a place), and thus can also mean "by flesh," "for flesh," "concerning flesh," or "in conformity with flesh." I have only seen it mean "according to" when followed by a cited author (e.g., "according to Euripides," i.e., "down through, or in the region of Euripides"), so it is unconventional to translate it as most Bibles do (a point against the usual reading and in favor of Doherty's). Even the "usual reading" is barely intelligible in the orthodox sense, especially since on that theory we should expect *en sarki* instead. The word *kata* can also have a comparative meaning, "corresponding with, after the fashion of," in other words "like flesh." In short, all of the common meanings of *kata* with the accusative support Doherty's reading: Jesus descended to and took on the likeness of flesh. It does not entail that he walked the earth. It could allow that, but many other strange details noted by Doherty are used to argue otherwise.⁶⁸

The Flesh of Christ

With this in mind, we can now look at the key passages about Christ and his "flesh" as presented in the epistles:

1. Romans 1:2-3 - ...the gospel of God, announced beforehand in the prophets, concerning his Son, who was come of the seed of David **according to the flesh** (*kata sarka*).
2. Romans 8:3 - ...God sending his own Son in the likeness of **sinful flesh** (*sarkos hamartias*)...
3. Romans 9:5 - ...and from whom [the Israelites] is the Christ **according to the flesh** (*kata sarka*). [This is usually translated (the Greek 'fleshed out') by saying "from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ" (NIV) or "from them in natural descent sprang the Messiah" (NEB). This automatically reads an historical Jesus understanding into it.]
4. Ephesians 2:14-15 - He has made the two [Jews and gentiles] one by abolishing **in his flesh** (lit., in the flesh of him: *en te sarki autou*) the Law with its rules and regulations.
5. Colossians 1:22 - He [God] has reconciled you through (Christ's) death **in his body of flesh** (*en to somati tes sarkos autou*).
6. 1 Timothy 3:16 - He who was manifested/revealed **in flesh** (*en sarki*), justified [referring to his resurrection] **in spirit** (*en pneumatī*)...
7. Hebrews 5:7 - **In the days of his flesh** (*en tes hemerais tes sarkos autou*), he offered up prayers and petitions...
8. Hebrews 10:20 - We enter the Holy Place [sanctuary] by a new and living way he has opened for us through the curtain **of his flesh** (*tes sarkos autou*).
9. 1 Peter 4:1 - Since Christ suffered **in** (the) **flesh** (*sarki*)... the person who has suffered in (the) flesh is finished with sin. [This is a good example of the paradigmatic parallel between deity and devotee, the sharing of experiences (suffering 'in flesh') having results in the believer.]

At first glance one might think that what we see here is simply a way, if a bit awkward and pedantic, to refer to Jesus' humanity, his incarnated person, his flesh on earth. But there is much to be regarded as curious. Why say Jesus is of the seed of David "according to the flesh," when one could say simply "the seed of / descended from David," or "descended from David on his human/earthly side"? (Paul has told us he got this information from scripture.) Why say Christ was "*revealed* in flesh" rather than "lived a life on earth"? (The constant—and virtually exclusive—use of 'revelation' verbs in this kind of statement should also seem unusual and curious.) Why say "in the days of his flesh" when the more natural thought would be "when he was on earth"? Then there are those cases where the word "flesh" is used quite mystically, hardly a reference to an earthly event or life, such as joining Jews and gentiles in his "body of flesh," or entering a spiritual sanctuary "through the curtain of his flesh." This is not mere metaphor; this is Paul's view of metaphysical reality and Christ within it.

Moreover, we have all these references to flesh (and more like them), yet not one reference to earth itself; all these references to the figure of Christ, yet not a single one to Jesus of Nazareth and his Gospel life. We find much about raising of Christ 'in the spirit' in the epistles, yet not a murmur of any tradition about resurrecting in flesh and spending time with his followers on earth. Another

curiosity is found in another stereotypical form of expression. As discussed before, Christ is repeatedly said to take on only a "likeness" to humans, as in Romans 8:3 and Hebrews 2:14, as well as the Philippians hymn of 2:6-11. It appears even more starkly in the Apocalypse of Elijah, where the author says (1:6) that God

...sent his son to the world so that he might save us from captivity. He did not inform an angel or an archangel or any principality when he was about to come to us, but he changed himself to be *like a man* when he was about to come to us so that he might save us from flesh. [*The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol.1, p.736]

Not only is Christ merely *like* a man, here all the participants involved are heavenly: angels and spirit forces; no mention is made of earthly humans having known or not known of his incarnation, or of witnessing this change into the likeness of a man. The point about not informing these angels and spirit powers suggests a similar element in the Ascension of Isaiah 9:13-15 and 1 Corinthians 2:8 in which Christ is said not to be recognized by the powers who crucify him. Does this passage belong in the context of what was still a mythical view of Christ—post-Pauline perhaps, but prior to the Gospels? Possible allusions to Revelation and 1 John have been noted in this work, but those documents as well contain no sign of an historical Gospel Jesus.⁶⁹

There is another curiosity to be considered. The usage of the "*sarx*" language is found across a wide spectrum of Christian literature over a considerable period of time. (*Kata sarka* itself is used in relation to Jesus in 1 Clement and the letters of Ignatius in similar fashion.) It was thus an established convention from very early on, and not limited to the peculiarities of one writer, such as Paul or even the 'school' which followed him and wrote in his name. If this is peculiar language to refer to Jesus' life on earth, employing nothing that clearly indicates such a life, how would it have arisen? How would such an odd convention have come to be so pervasive?

The fact is, from Paul to pseudo-Paul to Hebrews to 1 Peter to the Johannine epistles to the Pastorals, they all use the same terms. One might understand a single writer adopting such language out of his own idiosyncrasy to refer to Jesus' life or human descent, but how would it get passed on and retained by so many? Would it not have run up against resistance or simple lack of reception in the minds of those who would have preferred to be more direct, who would have had their own natural inclination to refer to Jesus' life in more clear and standard ways? Moreover, it is doubtful that the author of Hebrews enjoyed any influence from Pauline circles, and even the community of 1 Peter shows no direct dependence on Pauline thought. The Johannine writings betray their own isolation. What, then, were the channels of the spread of this apparently vague, awkward and non-intuitive language? In the context of a movement based on an historical person, can we envision how the situation we find in these documents would have arisen and spread? I suggest we cannot.

Flesh and Body

Rather, the language must be viewed, and the documents must be interpreted, in another way in order for it to make sense. Our minds must be opened to a different understanding of the language of "*sarx*" as applied to Christ in the epistles, part of its wider application in both physical and spiritual contexts. Everyone acknowledges that Paul and other early epistle writers were highly mystical in their presentation of Christ, almost beyond anything we can absorb today with our scientifically oriented minds. Even theologians, putting their best efforts into the matter, still fail to convince that these ideas can bear any relation even to religious reality; or they try to resolve the difficulty by turning it all into metaphor.

We can now take a closer look at the epistle passages laid out above, bringing in similar references to the word "body" (*soma*):

Ephesians 2:14-16 - For (Christ) himself is our peace, he who made the two [Jew and gentile] one, destroying the wall between them, by abolishing **in his flesh** (*en te sarki autou*) the Law... in order that he might create in himself a new man out of the two, and **in this one body** (*somati*) reconcile both to God through the cross...

Here, Paul's reference to Christ's flesh and body are certainly not literal. They are a mystical representation of the effects of his sacrifice and the combining of two peoples into one entity. The "body" referred to is not a human one, making the "new man" something other than a literal human individual. This is a refinement of the idea stated earlier in 1:10 that in the person of Christ, in the act of his sacrifice (the words 'flesh' and 'body' do not appear here), "all in heaven and earth are brought into a unity." Here we have a cosmic being on a grand supernatural scale, conforming to so much else in the Pauline imagery used to describe the metaphysical Christ (consider 1 Corinthians 8:6, 2 Corinthians 4:4-6, or Colossians 1:15-20, along with Hebrews 1:1-3)—and there is no sign that any of it is based on a recent itinerant preacher. A later passage in Ephesians can be added to this mix as well:

No man ever hated his own **flesh** [*sarka*], but nourishes and cares for it, just as Christ does the church, we being the members of his **body** [*somatos*]... and the two [a man and his wife] shall become one **flesh** [*sarka*]. This hidden mystery I interpret as referring to Christ and the church. [5:29-31]

Here, Christ's "body" is the church, also equated with the "flesh" of the Genesis verse. Paul himself frequently defines the "body" of Christ as the church, or describes the latter as an entity of which Christ forms the head and the believers the limbs (see below). In 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Paul describes Christ as a body made up of many parts, its individual members being the congregation of believers. How such congregations could ever have accepted and responded to such an extravagant rendering of a simple human man, if that's what it was, is almost unfathomable.

Colossians 1:22 combines "body" and "flesh" in virtually interchangeable and mutually supporting fashion:

He [God] has reconciled you [to himself] through Christ's death **in his body of flesh** [*en te somati tes sarkos autou*].

Like the idea of the unification of two peoples in Christ's "body" in Ephesians 2:16, here Christ's "flesh" is the vehicle of reconciliation. The writer has gone far beyond the scale of referring to some broken human being hanging on a hill of execution outside Jerusalem. In verse 24, he represents Paul as envisioning his own personal suffering (from some unspecified physical affliction) as "filling up" in his own flesh what was missing in Christ's sufferings. He submits to this willingly "for the sake of Christ's body (*somatos*), which is the church." Christ in regard to ideas of "body" and "flesh" is consistently cast in terms that are thoroughly mystical, carrying them once again beyond the individual human and earthly scale.

Perhaps the ultimate in mystical identification is found in Hebrews 10:20:

...we now have confidence to enter the Holy Place [sanctuary] by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way he opened for us through the curtain, that is, **his flesh** [*tes sarkos autou*].

The "curtain" is a reference to the veil of the Temple, blocking off the inner holiest sanctuary. For this writer, Jesus' own flesh constitutes the veil through which the believer can now pass to enter a new sanctuary, one cleansed and transformed by the entry of the heavenly High Priest Jesus bearing the sacrificial offering of his own blood.

"*Soma*" is also used by Paul and those who wrote in his name to refer to the unity the believers share in Christ. Together they form a common "body": Christ is the "head" while believers, or "the church," are the "members/organs."

1 Corinthians 12:27 - Now you are the **body** [*soma*] of Christ, and each one of you is apart of it.

Colossians 1:18 - And he is **the head of the body** [*he kephale tou somatos*], the church.

Ephesians 1:22-23 - God...gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his **body** [*soma*], the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Such ideas may be mystical, but they are not metaphorical. For Paul, such a unified "body" does exist, made up of the flesh of humans and the body of Christ, a body of *spirit*, not of an incarnated earthly flesh. This is a body and a relationship that spans heaven and earth. Paul has been able to produce concepts of mystical reality encompassing his dualistic universe, and that is the sort of thinking we must bring to his language.

Most modern commentators tend to gloss over the question of how this "body of Christ" should be interpreted, analyzing the passages without judging whether the idea itself is literal or metaphorical. If it is meant to describe a literal body

(within a supposed spiritual reality), we have Paul presenting an idea which today's rational mind would have difficulty understanding or accepting. The conservative *New Bible Dictionary* argues for a metaphorical understanding, without acknowledging that Paul never indicates that he is offering a metaphor. (He has no hesitation in doing so in Galatians 4:21-31 when presenting his allegory of the two sons of Abraham.) Since this idea crops up repeatedly throughout the Pauline corpus, always with a tone of literal actuality, we ought to take Paul as referring to what is for him a literal spiritual "body of Christ."⁷⁰ This will become even more apparent when we examine the key passage of 1 Corinthians 15:44-49, where it can be nothing but a literal spiritual body.

There is no reason to dismiss all this language as poetic metaphor, some overblown imagery everyone throughout an entire faith movement decided to attach to a human man whom they then ceased to show any interest in. The terms "flesh" and "body" along with other anthropomorphic language have been used throughout the literature as ways of describing spiritual entities and processes in a supernatural dimension which overlaps and affects the material. Contained within the latter are the congregations of believers, forming a mystical union between human communities and spirit deities who guarantee salvation through this counterpart relationship spanning earth and Heaven, the physical and the spiritual. This was one of the grand concepts of Hellenistic religion, a multifaceted yet integrated universe designed for personal salvation from flesh to spirit. Attaching terms like "flesh" and "body" to Christ was these writers' way of representing the working elements on the divine side of the equation. They could envision Christ as taking on an equivalent form of flesh (and blood), just as the gods, according to Cicero, possessed, and the demons. All are located in the spiritual realm. Christ's "flesh" is not of earth.

Christ as "Descendant"

We now proceed to the two "flesh" verses most alleged to be problematic for the mythicist viewpoint.

Romans 1:3-4 - (...God's gospel of the Son), who was of the seed (*spermatos*) of David **according to the flesh** (*kata sarka*), (and) who was declared Son of God with power according to the spirit (*kata pneuma*) of holiness by his resurrection from the dead.

Romans 9:5 - ...and from whom (the Israelites) is the Christ **according to the flesh** [*kata sarka*].

In defining the word "*sarx*" it was pointed out earlier that some usages of the word do not describe flesh per se, but relationships: between humans, and between humanity and divinity. Thus Paul says in Romans 9:3 that the Jews are his "kinsmen according to the flesh (*kata sarka*)"; in Romans 4:1 he says that Abraham is "our forefather according to the flesh (*kata sarka*)." Both statements represent relationships between humans. But being a kinsman and a forefather is automatically a relationship of flesh, of physicality, so that the phrase "according

to the flesh" ought here to be superfluous and thus unnecessary. Why then does Paul put it in? We can only assume that he does so because in his thinking the world contains other relationships of being a kinsman and of someone's "seed" that are *not* the usual fleshly, physical ones. Indeed, in Romans 9:6-8 he says:

It is not the children **of the flesh** (*tes sarkos*) [i.e., children of Abraham in natural physical descent] who are the children of God; rather, the children of the promise are reckoned as (Abraham's) seed.

Here Paul is defining one of those other, non-physical, relationships: between Abraham and the gentiles who are regarded as his "seed" (*sperma*). They have become the "children of the promise." This is a mystical linkage based on faith and being "in Christ," not on any genealogical, physical descent. In Galatians 3 he further expounds on this, summing up in verse 29: "If you [the gentiles] belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed." They are seed of a forefather without being of physical descent, but through a mystical connection.

But if humans can have a relationship to humans mystically, as in the gentiles being "of Abraham's seed," then there should be even less impediment to seeing Christ, a spiritual entity, also linkable to a human figure in the same way: mystically. Christ being "of David's seed" (Romans 1:3) is no less feasible, by Paul's standards, than his gentiles being "of Abraham's seed." Neither one is literal. Both are arrived at through mystical thinking, and both are dependent on scripture. Why does Paul in Romans 1:3 use the term "flesh," "*kata sarka*"! Because here Christ has a relationship with the inferior world of humanity. The phrase specifies it as 'in relation to a human being,' '*in relation to flesh*.'" (If Paul were speaking of a human Jesus who was reputedly of the house of David, whether by father or mother, he would have had no need to note that it was by physical lineage, no need for "*kata sarka*." That would have been undeniable.)

Note that in the next verse, we have a relationship in the opposite direction: within the world of spirit. Christ relates to God as his Son "*kata pneuma*," represented in the declaration of such (from Psalm 2:7) following his exaltation after death, and at the acquiring of power over the cosmos as a result of that exaltation. The "according to the spirit" (perhaps 'in relation to spirit') is cryptic here because it adds the phrase "of holiness," and it has been an unresolved question as to whether this is a reference to the Holy Spirit or to the spiritual venue of the event, the spiritual realm of heaven. It may also mean 'in a spiritual way,' (just as some uses of *kata sarka* refer to the 'ways of the world').

It is possible that these two verses are a pre-Pauline liturgical unit, which by its nature (and the demands of poetic structure) imposed a "*kata sarka* / *kata pneuma*" dichotomy upon the text, so that we cannot know the exact intention or understanding behind the first phrase. Also, as discussed in chapter 8, the lead-in of verse 2 makes it clear that Paul is assigning the source of both these items to scripture, to the gospel of God about his Son as pre-announced in the prophets. Messianic prophecy was seen as telling that the spiritual Christ proceeded out of David; other scriptural passages described his relationship to the Father. We are not required to assume that Paul invented or repeated these words with any

concrete comprehension of what it meant for a spiritual being to be "of David's seed," though to be God's Son, an emanation of God in the line of personified Wisdom and the Greek Logos, was easy enough.

Mystical Relationships

That Christ could be regarded as "of David's seed" in a way that did not mean through literal earthly lineage is corroborated by a number of other considerations. First, we have just seen that Paul envisions Christ as being part of a relationship with other human beings, believers in the church. He is joined to them in ways which involve concepts of "body" and "flesh." If Christ in spirit could be joined to the flesh of Paul's fellow Christians, why not to the flesh of David in a similar mystical way? The joining in the former case is not a joining when Christ was on earth; it is Christ and the believers as they are *now* to Paul, with a spiritual Christ who is in Heaven (regardless of whether he had been on earth before or not). Thus it would not require Christ ever to have been human. Scripture told him that his Christ was joined to David; neither would that have required that Christ had ever been human or on earth.

Second, it is regularly claimed as proof of Paul's knowledge of an historical Jesus that in Galatians 3:16 he declares Jesus to have been of the seed (the noun *sperma*) of Abraham, implying that he was a physical human descendant—in other words, a Jew in history. But this is a prime example of reading the literality of the Gospels into the epistles. The passage is not nearly so explicit:

Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. It [scripture] does not say: 'And to the seeds,' as though meaning many people, but rather as one: 'And to your seed,' who is Christ.

This is the extent of Paul's demonstration that Christ (rather than the Jews collectively) is the "seed of Abraham": because scripture uses the singular word, not the plural. (He has, however, no difficulty in using the singular in Romans 9:7 when referring to the people of Israel as the physical "seed" of Abraham.) No appeal is made to any historical tradition about a human Jesus' known ancestral lineage. Paul's 'proof from scripture that Christ is the one to whom the promise was directed he nowhere backs up by further defining Christ as of Abraham's seed in the normal physical way; nor does his 'proof from scripture necessarily entail it, since scripture is commonly used, not just by Paul, to 'prove' certain things about Christ in his heavenly state (consider Hebrews 1). Thus, Paul's statement cannot serve to support the common claim that he has called Jesus a human descendant of Abraham. Indeed, the extent of his statement could as easily fit itself to a spiritual Christ in a mystical way, as to any necessity that it be a human being which Paul has in mind.

Moreover, why would Paul need to appeal to such a dubious 'proof as the singular of "*sperma*" if Jesus were known to be of the family of David, or simply an historical Jew? This automatically would make him a descendant of Abraham, and include him in those who were of Abraham's seed. As well, there should have been no need to appeal to that scriptural singular in order to declare an

exclusivity for Christ. Such an exclusivity should not have been required. The gentiles are able to get in on the action because they have joined themselves to Christ through faith (Gal. 3:26-29), but this would be so even if others were still included in the Abrahamic "seed." Is Paul trying to *exclude* the Jews, to focus the inheritance of the promise entirely on the gentiles who believe in Christ, letting not even the Jews in the door? That would not fit his attitude toward the Jews in general, whom he believes can and will yet be saved. Nor does it fit the thought of Romans 9:6-8, where he seems to allow that those, even of Israel, who adopt faith in Christ will also be reckoned as the 'true' seed of Abraham.

No, the appeal to the scriptural word in the singular is needed for a different reason. If Christ was a spiritual entity, if he was not an historical Jew, then a linkage through physical lineage to Abraham was not available. Some other grounds needed to be provided for Christ to serve as the necessary link between Abraham and the gentiles, to allow the promise to flow through him from the former to the latter. As always, Paul has found those grounds in scripture, in this case a weak, almost laughable basis on which to make his argument, pointing to the singular of "seed" as inapplicable to the Jewish people as a whole and instead referring to only one entity: Christ himself. Through that device—apparently the only one he could come up with—he was forced, as a side-effect, to shut the door on the Jews. They only get back in, back to their traditional inheritance of the promise, by joining the gentiles in adopting faith in Christ.

Thus, if Paul's Jesus can be styled the "seed" of Abraham in a mystical, non-physical way (just as the gentiles have become the "seed" of Abraham in the same fashion), there is nothing to prevent him from having been equally styled the "seed" of David in a mystical way. Unlike the link to Abraham extensively discussed in Galatians 3, we have no indication in Romans 1 as to why Paul or other early Christians would have had an interest in seeing Jesus as of David's seed, other than because scripture said so. One possibility is that it served to declare and demonstrate that the heavenly Son was in fact the promised Messiah.

It certainly does not seem to have served to corroborate Paul's link of the Abrahamic promise to his gentile converts. He has, in fact, made the point in Romans 9:6-7 that physical descent determines nothing and is overridden by other considerations. (Hebrews, too, makes the point that physical lineage is not the determining factor in the heavenly Jesus' High Priesthood.) An association with David is never raised again, either by Paul or any other epistle writer of the 1st century. It appears in 2 Timothy 2:8 where it looks like a case of the 2nd century pseudo-Pauline author simply drawing on Romans 1:3. Revelation also makes mention of the Lamb's descent from David, but there is no earthly context to it, and like everything else in that document it seems directly derived from scripture and not from any historical tradition.

The final corroboration supporting a non-literal understanding for the phrase "of David's seed" can be found once an historical Jesus arrived on the scene. There is a secondary reading of Acts 2:30 that speaks of Christ as a "descendant" of David *kata sarka* who would gain the throne of Israel. Since the author of

Acts belonged to the line of thought that Jesus was born of a virgin, he was thus not being presented as a literal descendant of David. Ignatius does the same in his epistle to the Smyrneans. He declares (1:1) that Christ was "of the line of David according to the flesh (*kata sarka*)," yet in the same sentence declares him born of a virgin (something derived from Isaiah 7:14, with its "young woman" mistranslated in the Septuagint as "virgin"). This should have "ruled out any understanding of Jesus as a literal human descendant of David.

Ancient and modern apologists have subsequently come up with the idea that Jesus was a descendant of David through Mary. But ancient royal lineage was not through the female. And when Matthew and Luke came to invent lineages for Jesus, they presented the line of descent not as through Mary but through Joseph, even if he was only Jesus' nominal father. But 'adoption' would have been an even weaker linkage, and just as unacceptable. And yet Irenaeus and Tertullian both state that Jesus' descent from David was through Mary, even in the absence of any such genealogy and in contradiction to the genealogies of Matthew and Luke. Thus Christians for two millennia have been faced with an unresolvable conundrum. If those ancient Christians were able to accept and live with such an irrational contradiction, they would surely have been able to accept the equal conundrum of a spiritual Christ being of the "seed" of David. In both cases, they were kowtowing to scripture.

Throughout this book, the concept has been stressed of scripture itself being the embodiment of the 'event' of Christ. He and his activities have been "revealed" through a new reading of scripture, and apparently *solely* from scripture. From there one discovers information about him—even including what he "says." Hebrews 10:5 assigns him a "body" for sacrifice because it said so in Psalm 40:6-8 (LXX), which the author quotes, understanding it as the voice of Christ speaking from scripture. Even in 5:7, the writer has Christ performing things "in the days of his flesh" which are drawn from scripture. 1 Peter 4:1 has him "suffering" (which had to be in "flesh," not in spirit) because Isaiah 53 told him so, and that is the sole source he appeals to in 2:22-23. There is no oral tradition or historical memory anywhere in evidence. Through such revelation Christ has "come" in the present time, which is why so many of the references in the early non-Gospel record talk of Christ in the present tense. As Bishop Lightfoot observed in regard to 1 Clement over a century ago, they know him as a present phenomenon rather than as an historical man of the past. Thus, Christ is "of the seed of David" because it said so—even using those very words—in many messianic passages of scripture now identified with the spiritual Christ. And maybe that was simply that.

If Christ can be seen as having a mystical relationship with David, he can be seen as having a mystical relationship with Israel as a whole. If he can be seen as in some way of the seed of David *kata sarka*, he can have some connection to Israel *kata sarka* as well. As noted earlier, savior gods are usually associated with the nation or people that have given rise to them, and we can note that in the Romans 9 passage, Christ is included in a list of things that 'belong' to Israel, for

which they are to be valued: such things as "the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises, (and) the patriarchs." As part of that picture, Paul says, Christ is linked to the patriarchs "*kata sarka*," implying no more than another of the mystical links he has created for his Savior Jesus. Those patriarchs and the Jews in general have produced the Christ, perhaps having the thought in mind that he has been discovered in scripture, as the epistles repeatedly tell us. Again, there was no need for the early Christian cult to understand exactly what this meant. The general concept of spiritual-material parallels between heaven and earth would aid in accepting it in principle if not through comprehension. And since the thought of people like Paul already contained so much of a mystical nature that could hardly be rationally explained, such as the inclusion of humans in the spiritual "body" of Christ, why should anyone have balked at Romans 1:3 or 9:5?

Knowing Christ "According to the Flesh"

2 Corinthians 5:16 is a passage using "*kata sarka*" which is frequently claimed to be an outright reference to an historical earthly Jesus.

So from now on we regard no one [lit., no man] from a worldly point of view (*kata sarka*). Though we once regarded Christ in this way [lit., **according to the flesh**], we do so no longer. [NIV]

If even the conservative NIV recognizes that "*sarx*" does not refer to Christ himself but to the believer's way of knowing him, we can accept that this is the proper understanding. Several scholars and other translations recognize this meaning. (The NEB has: "With us therefore worldly standards have ceased to count in our estimate of any man; even if once they counted in our understanding of Christ, they do so now no longer.")

It makes sense, because here the phrase *kata sarka* is used both with Christ as well as with "no man," and it would be awkward to think, if *kata sarka* referred to literal flesh, that Paul would be inferring that while we once regarded other men as creatures of flesh we do so no longer. Rather, he must mean that we once treated other humans according to a 'fleshly' relationship with and outlook upon the world, but now we do so according to our new spiritual relationship with the world. The same expression immediately used toward Christ must mean the same thing. It is the old dichotomy again between living in flesh and spirit, even if Paul here does not use *kata pneuma*.

But what were the circumstances of the previous way of regarding Christ? Scholars holding the traditional understanding of *kata sarka* have suggested that this was Paul's and others' knowledge about Jesus before their conversions, simply as a human man. But while this could conceivably apply to Paul given an historical Jesus context (even though he would never have known him directly), it would not likely apply to his readers off in the Hellenistic world, who would not have been in a position to "know" much if anything about such a Judean figure before Paul arrived and started preaching him as the exalted Son. There would have been no "*kata sarka*" phase of knowledge about Jesus for them.

In any case, the context suggests a different answer. Paul throughout 2 Corinthians 5 is speaking of shifting states, between being in the present body and anticipating being clothed in a different one, living by what we believe, not by what we see, being out of our mind and in our right mind. Paul to some extent is rambling, and while he consistently uses the plural pronoun "we" to refer to the combination of himself and his readers, there are moments when he slips into using the "we" for himself alone (as in verses 12-13). Thus it is unsure, when speaking (in verse 16b) about knowing Christ according to worldly standards, whether he means a true "we" or only himself. If the latter, he could have in mind his former views before conversion when he regarded belief in Christ as something to be condemned and persecuted; now that he is a believer, of course, his outlook has changed. If to some extent he is including his readers in the thought, it would be in theory only, summing up the principle he has been outlining that one's faith and outlook can bring about a new perspective on one's life situation, a new way of viewing things, from *kata sarka* to *kata pneuma*.

Christ in Flesh and Spirit

The christological hymns of Philippians 2:6-11 and 1 Timothy 3:16 are both liturgical compositions written before the epistles in which they are quoted. The Philippians hymn does not contain the word "*sarx*" but only the idea of taking on the form/likeness/fashion of man. But 1 Timothy 3:16 contains both sides of the flesh-spirit dichotomy, as does 1 Peter 3:18 which may echo a hymnic fragment as well. Here we can take another look at both of the latter passages in light of the present discussion.

1 Timothy 3:16 - He who was manifested/revealed in flesh (*en sarki*)...

This is the opening line of a six-line christological hymn. Is "*sarx*" a reference to Christ's spiritual body, as it is in some other usages of "flesh" in connection with him which we find in Paul? Or is it understood as "in the realm of flesh," being nothing more than saying that this spiritual figure was revealed to or within the world of humans? Consider what the next line of the hymn says: "...was vindicated/justified in spirit (*enpneumati*)..." That recurring duality. We can compare it with a nearly identical duality in the other passage:

1 Peter 3:18 - (Christ died for sins), having been put to death in (the) flesh, but made alive in (the) spirit.

This raises the question: are these terms being used in a locational sense? Do they designate in what 'spheres' Christ was manifested and vindicated, died and raised? Or are both passages a reference to his form or state in which he experienced both, speaking of relationships in regard to the realm of flesh and the realm of spirit? It is something to which we have found a close parallel in Romans 1:3-4, which has the same dichotomy: a relationship to the flesh (with David) and a relationship to the spirit (with God, as his Son). In any case, there is in both passages a use of the word "flesh" which has no necessary reference to any human flesh of Christ.

Christ's "Flesh" vs. "Body"

"Flesh" and "body" are both used in application to Christ by Paul and those who wrote in his name. If he is referring to a human man, the terms should be interchangeable. "Body" should have been employed at least some of the time *in relation to Christ's incarnated body*. And yet this does not prove to be the case. First, Paul makes a noticeable differentiation in usage which more or less lines up with the mythicist division between Christ's activities in the lower heavens and his original and re-exalted state in the higher heavens. Second, while Paul has a definite conception of Christ's spiritual body, *he shows no cognizance of Christ having had a material body*. Indeed, it is conspicuous by its absence.

The two categories can be delineated in this way:

1. Christ's form/substance when he descends to the realm of corruptibility to suffer and die and take on an inferior nature (the "likeness" of something belonging to that realm). Here, the term Paul always uses is "flesh."
2. The heavenly form/substance which Christ regularly possesses when he is not in the realm of No. 1. This includes the mystical entity which Christ and believers of the "church" form in combination, referred to by Paul as "the body of Christ." Here, the term Paul always uses is "body."

Though occasionally he can use the word neutrally, "flesh" in any context is, in Paul's mind, nothing to be valued or boasted about. I suggest, then, that it is in keeping with this general attitude that he applies the term "flesh" to Christ's spiritual substance when he enters the lower realm to undergo his experiences of suffering and death. (Christ taking on flesh or descending to the realm of flesh is always styled as reducing himself to a state of inferiority and subservience, as in the Philippians hymn.) If Paul regards the fleshly realm in negative terms, it makes sense that he would tend to linguistically fashion Christ's spiritual form when he enters that realm by using the word "flesh," *sarx*. He would also style any scripture-derived relationship with a physical being or race, *qua* physical, by using *sarx*. For example,

Romans 8:3 - in the likeness of sinful **flesh** (*homoiomati sarkos hamartias*)

Here Christ has entered that lower realm of corruptibility and taken on a form/substance relating to it. This "flesh" is still *spiritual* flesh, but belonging to an inferior state.

Ephesians 2:14 - abolishing **in his flesh** (*sarki*) the law

In Paul's mystical outlook, the law was abolished on the cross, an act taking place within the lower realm. Thus, the pseudo-Pauline writer is using the word "flesh."

Colossians 1:22 - He has reconciled you [to God] in **the body of his flesh** (*en to somati tes sarkos autou*).

Here the use of the word "body" is superfluous. But he is defining a *type* of body: the "flesh" type, which implies that Christ has another type, the non-flesh,

usually referred to as the "spiritual body." Again, the context is the cross, the death in the lower heavens, and thus *sarx* is the operative word.

On the other side of the divide, "body" becomes the operative word.

Ephesians 2:16 - His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two [Jew and gentile], and in this one **body** (*somati*) to reconcile both of them to God.

The "body" was new, the post-crucifixion result: the law being destroyed **on the cross** (using *sarx*, see above), the new body being formed and existing **after the cross** (using *soma*). Other uses of the word "body," as itemized earlier, refer to Christ as a mystical/spiritual entity which also includes the church:

1 Corinthians 12:27 - Now you are the **body** of Christ

Colossians 1:18 - And he is the head of the **body**, the church

Ephesians 4:12 - so that the **body** of Christ may be built up

This is a fully positive connotation; no suffering or inferiority are involved. Unlike Romans 1:3 and 9:5, it involves a linkage to humans who are no longer walking in the flesh (as do normal people) but walking in the spirit, *kata pneuma*. They are living in the spiritual world already, joined to Christ who is in the actual spiritual world, spanning the two realms.

Remember that we are here analyzing how Paul (and the pseudo-Pauls, whom we can assume absorbed his teaching and his language and thinking) used this varied terminology. Neither he nor anyone else would have sat down and worked out a fixed program to distinguish "*sarx*" from "*soma*," which they then carefully followed. It would have developed as a habit. There were inevitably little inconsistencies, but even these can be understood from their context. The main one occurs in the discussion of the Eucharistic meal in 1 Corinthians:

11:27 — (whoever) will be guilty of sinning against the **body and blood** of the Lord

11:29 - who eats and drinks without recognizing the **body and blood** of the Lord

The context is the same in both cases (they are only two verses apart). An exception to the regular practice, the inclusion of the word "blood" has attracted the word "body" instead of "flesh" so that both relate to the lower realm of flesh in which Christ shed his blood. The Eucharistic formula has tied the "cup" to the blood, bringing in the word body to tie to the "bread." Why not *flesh* and blood? Possibly because this is a sacramental context, and flesh does not belong in a divine sacrament. In 10:16, Paul asks: "Is the bread we break not a participation in the body of Christ?" This is a mystical, wholly positive concept, more to be associated with his permanent divine self. Paul would hardly choose "flesh."

What do epistles outside the Pauline corpus do?

Hebrews 5:7 - in the days of his **flesh** (*en tais hemerais tes sarkos autou*)...

"Days" is temporary. The spiritual flesh of his visit to the lower realm was temporary, while his spiritual body is eternal. What he did there involved "cries

and tears" and "offering up petitions"—both taken from scripture (Psalm 22:24 and Psalm 116:1) and both referring to 'fleshly' activities. But then we get to:

Hebrews 10:5 - a **body** (*soma*) you prepared for me...[a body which will do God's will, meaning undergo sacrifice]

But this is a quote from scripture (Psalm 40:6-8), and thus its word "body" must be kept, even though it is a reference to Christ's inferior spiritual substance when being sacrificed. The scriptural word is carried over into 10:10 - "we shall be made holy through the sacrifice of the **body** of Jesus Christ." Although, since Hebrews describes the "sacrifice" entirely in terms of the offering of his (spiritual) blood in the heavenly sanctuary, perhaps "body" could be justified according to the Pauline practice. But we need not worry about holding Hebrews to Pauline standards, and in fact this epistle goes against that standard again:

Hebrews 10:20 - he has opened for us a new way (into the new sanctuary) through the veil of his '**flesh**' [this uses *sarx* in a heavenly setting, contrary to Pauline usage].

Finally, the example that goes directly against Pauline usage and illustrates what Paul never says:

1 Peter 2:24 - (Christ) who bore our sins in his **body** (*somati*) on the tree... (although in 3:18 the writer does say that he was "put to death in **flesh** [*en sarki*]," though that could mean simply 'in the sphere of the flesh')

This strict division of terms applied to Christ which we find in the Pauline corpus would go against any natural inclination to apply such words to someone who had walked the earth in a human body. For an historical Jesus, "flesh" and "body" would be equally applicable to his person on earth. Why would Paul keep "body" exclusively for his post-incarnation state? In doing so, he risks creating confusion in the minds of his readers—the same confusion we see in the *New Bible Dictionary's* entry on "Body of Christ," in which Rev. Farrer wonders how this Pauline term could be literal, since that would involve the idea of the "body" referring to the incarnated one. But this very objection points out the significance of the Pauline pattern. These writers talk of Christ's "body" entirely in the mystical, spiritual terms we have been examining. They never use it in an earthly context, nor do they try to prevent the confusion Rev. Farrer feels by clarifying that they mean only Christ's body in heaven, *as opposed to the one he had on earth*. The latter is never mentioned, never accounted for. Indeed, we can consider the existence of such a thing as excluded, as we shall see in the most important "body" passage of all: 1 Corinthians 15:44-49.

On the other hand, the Pauline writers could place "*sarx*" in the realm of flesh and "*soma*" in the realm of spirit with no adverse effects because it worked in the context of a Jesus being entirely spiritual, with the idea of spiritual flesh representing his inferior state in the lower heavens when undergoing sacrifice. And they could keep "body" for Christ's purer spiritual state, his 'spiritual body' in the realm of higher spirit to which he returned after his resurrection.

Christ's "Flesh" vs. "Spirit" and the Question of Sin

The same can be said when we consider Paul's general contrast between "flesh" and "spirit." When applied to humans, flesh is bad, spirit is good. "Walking in flesh" leads to evil and destruction, "walking in spirit" leads to purity and salvation:

Romans 8:6 - The mind of the flesh is death, but the mind of the spirit is life and peace. [See also Rom. 8:4, 5, 9; Gal. 3:3, etc.]

But what of such a contrast between flesh and spirit when the terms are used of Christ? It is curious that Christ's state of being in flesh is never addressed in regard to a life on earth. Paul, who monotonously and obsessively pronounces human flesh as corrupt, godless and defiling, who derides walking in the way of flesh as doom-laden, never addresses the sort of question that would surely have been raised. Was Jesus' incarnated flesh corrupt, too, or at least at risk? Did Jesus ever walk in the ways of flesh, or was he tempted?

This can be related to the idea of whether Christ was "without sin." Here as well, the questions are obvious and the silence perplexing. Romans 6:10 - *The death he died, he died to sin once for all.* "Does that mean Jesus sinned before he died, Paul?" Romans 8:3 - *God sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh.* "How did Jesus keep from sinning if he was just like us?" 2 Corinthians 5:21 - *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us.* "How could Jesus be free of sin, yet constitute sin?" No doubt Paul could have given a characteristic mystical answer in regard to a metaphysical Christ, but could any answer have resolved the perplexity in the context of a human Jesus of Nazareth?

1 John 3:5 - *He was revealed that he might take away our sins, and in him is no sin.* Here there is no necessary reference to an historical figure of flesh, since the sinlessness is *current*, the verb is in the present tense. Moreover, Christ is said only to have been "revealed" in the present time—although 4:1-4 suggests that some were starting to think that he had come to earth, while others denied it.

1 Peter 2:22 - *(He) who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in his mouth.* How does the writer know this? The answer could have been Paul's answer: "It is found in scripture!" For 1 Peter is simply quoting verses from Isaiah 53. There was never any need to explain the "flesh" of Christ in terms of what it did or did not have in common with human flesh on earth because there was no such commonality between them. Christ's flesh and body, sinless or otherwise, existed in the spiritual world of scripture and its revelations.

It might be asked: could a spiritual figure be regarded as sinless? In what way, if he possessed nothing that could lead him into sin and nowhere to commit it? But the sin of pride, for example, could be committed by a spiritual being; many were the fallen angels who were guilty of it. The sin of disobedience was also possible, particularly for a Son who had a mission of suffering and death to fulfill. 1 Peter 1:15 says:

The One who called you is holy; like him, be holy in all your conduct, just as the one who called you is holy, for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

This quote is, once again, from scripture (Lev. 19:2), but it refers to God. Holiness certainly involves sinlessness, and the Son of God was no doubt seen as (and required to be) holy and sinless in the same way. Neither feature required him, or God, to be in a human body.

Did Jesus walk in the ways of flesh or of spirit? Naturally, everyone could be assumed to know the answer. But that answer would have presented an ideal example to be followed. Paul is constantly haranguing his readers not to walk in the way of the flesh (*kata sarka*), but in the way of the spirit (*kata pneuma*)—*even though they inhabit human bodies*. Surely the historical Jesus in *his* human body would have been the perfect illustration of this. He lived in the flesh but conducted himself according to the spirit. Yet Paul fails throughout his letters, just as the writer of 1 Peter 1:15 did, to offer Jesus of Nazareth as the prime example of how to be *kata sarka* but to live *kata pneuma*.¹¹

Through the language of *sarx* and *soma* in conjunction with *pneuma*, the early cultic Christians were able to express their diverse views about the world of flesh and the world of spirit, the connections between themselves and their savior god. It turns out that there is nothing strange or woolly about it. It was a language ideally suited to its application, and they knew exactly what they meant. It is we who have lost sight of its meaning. For all Paul's faults and obsessions, his dubious exegesis from scripture, his intolerance for any view but his own, there is no question that he brought a depth of sophisticated theology to his Christ which his rivals and forebears could never have dreamed of. The fact that the Gospels show barely a hint of such esoterica in regard to their Jesus of Nazareth suggests that the evangelists, coming primarily out of the Q tradition, had never encountered Paul or his theology, or else did not understand it. That powerful theology is the chief reason why Paul—and Christianity—has stayed intellectually vital over the centuries. Unfortunately, it was not for the fact that anyone understood what he was talking about.

Paul and the "Heavenly Man"

Gods, like all life, tend to reproduce. As their sons and daughters grow and enter the family business, they are appointed executives and middle managers. This process of gods stripping off aspects of themselves which become divine entities in their own right and take over specific roles in the spiritual board room is known as "hypostatization"; each divinity thus created is an "hypostasis," an emanation of the original god taking on a life of his or her own. Gnosticism was a notorious example of divine over-population through this process, while other religious cultures had heavenly administrations that were more streamlined. Judaism developed personified Wisdom to be God's helper and revealer, Christianity the intermediary Son and Christ as the agent of salvation. Perhaps the seminal mythology of this sort, and the one which cast its shadow over much of the ancient world, was the Iranian-Persian system embodied in the religion of Zoroastrianism. (Persian influence upon Hebrew thinking during the time of the Babylonian exile and the subsequent Persian empire, which included Palestine, has been recognized as extensive.)

The *Anthrōpos* in Heaven

To facilitate things like creation and communication with the created world, the highest God—Ahura Mazda, the God of Light—created the first man, known as the Primeval Man or Primal Man; in Zoroastrianism he was known under the name "Gayomart" (mortal life). Greek uses the word "*anthrōpos*" (man) for him. This was not on earth, nor in flesh, but as a spirit in the spiritual realm. After a few millennia, and after the creation of the material world, he assumed a corporeal state, but was killed by the enemy of Ahura Mazda, Ahriman the God of Darkness. Out of his death (some have it from his own gardening activities) the first human couple was produced. They pledged allegiance to Ahura Mazda but were seduced to evil by Ahriman, the antagonist of the good God—this being an 'original sin' on humanity's part. For this they were punished, and death entered the world. Gayomart was a sacrificial figure, as his death produced beneficial effects upon the earth, and he was viewed as due to be resuscitated at the end time. While he could thus be styled a savior-type figure, that official role was given to a future entity known as "Saoshyant," who would appear at the end of time, at which point a critical battle between the forces of good and evil would take place.⁷²

While many parallels with Old and New Testament mythology are clearly evident (the Hebrew borrowing from the Zoroastrian) and do not need pointing out, the fundamental pattern in this myth is the existence of a first "Man" who is heavenly and serves as the intermediary for material creation, and particularly for humankind. This is a recurring theme in ancient creation myths and religious philosophy. Reflecting God himself, this first, heavenly "Man" is the direct image of God, and that image in turn serves as the model or source of the actual creation of humanity.

In some forms of Gnosticism, the chain of authority could be longer, as we saw in *Eugnostos the Blessed*, which passes through several orders of "Man" before arriving at human beings. The link between God and humans is through intermediary phases, with an entity or entities variously referred to as "Man" having an existence in the spiritual world. Thus, in any investigation of Paul's use of "*anthrōpos*" in regard to Christ, this heavenly dimension to the concept of 'man' needs to be taken into account, especially when Paul presents it with mythological overtones.

In the pagan Hermetica, its most famous document, *Poimandres*, speaks of an 'archetypal human being' who is a direct emanation of God:

Then the intellect that is parent of all [i.e., God], by being life and light, engendered a human being equal to itself [i.e., the Primal Man]....And it handed over to its offspring all its own crafted products....And having complete authority over the world of mortals and of irrational living animals, it [the Primal Man] broke through the container [the envelope surrounding the spheres of heaven], bent down through the composite framework, and showed God's beautiful form to the downward-tending natural order...Then the natural order received its beloved and wholly twined around it. [12-14]

Here, the Primal Man (who is distinct from other, previous emanations of God who were responsible for the creation of the natural order) descends through the heavens, revealing and infusing God into the lower world and producing human beings as reflections of itself, in whom it becomes indwelling reason and immortality. This descent of the archetypal human being is faintly reminiscent of the descending divinity in the Philippians hymn (2:6-11), though having no sacrificial element. *Poimandres* also tells the seer (16), "It is precisely this that has been a hidden mystery down to the present day." Like Paul, with his "mystery/secret of Christ hidden for long ages," visionaries of all cultures imagined that Heaven was finally revealing the truths of God and the universe to themselves. At every turn we see that Christianity was a product of its times and followed in well-trod footprints.

The Heavenly Man in Gnosticism

Gnosticism possessed a 'Primal Man' concept, though with much diversity. It was likely an outgrowth, through various Hellenistic and syncretizing processes, from traditions going back to the Iranian Gayomart. Unfortunately, our evidence for specific gnostic doctrine comes almost entirely from the 2nd century CE and

later, and so it is difficult to align it in any detail with the thinking which lies within and behind Paul. However, there can be little doubt that such ideas were developing in the 1st century (and perhaps even earlier) in the movement which flowered in the full-blown Gnosticism of the 2nd century. This is confirmed now that recent scholarship on Gnosticism, following study of the unearthed Nag Hammadi documents, recognizes that such a movement was not an outgrowth of early Christianity and the figure of the Gospel Jesus, as was earlier naively thought, but largely constituted a developing expression of its own. (Chapter 20 will be devoted to a broad picture of Gnosticism.)

As for the use of the term "man" in Gnosticism, *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (VIII, p.412-13) gives an extensive list of its appearances. Some are designations of God himself as "Man," as in the Apocryphon of John 14,23. As Gilbert Murray puts it (*The Five Stages of Greek Religion*, p.197),

Since the ultimate unseen God, spirit though He is, made Man in His image...it follows that He is Himself Man. He is the real, the ultimate, the perfect and eternal Man, of whom all bodily men are feeble copies. [Compare the "Immortal Man" of Eugnostos the Blessed, p. 153 above.]

But the term "Man" is also used, says Murray, of "a figure subordinate to the supreme God or His equivalent in the pleroma, but which for that reason *is all the more central in the pleroma and in mythological events...* [emphasis mine]," for example in The Hypostasis of the Archons 96,33 and the Apocryphon of John 20. The Gospel of Philip is a Christian Gnostic compilation of teachings that have been assigned to Jesus, with commentary by the author, who says:

The heavenly man has many more sons than the earthly man. If the sons of Adam [the earthly man] are many, although they die, how much more the sons of the perfect man, they who do not die but are always begotten... [they] are nourished from the place whence they have been born. [58,17-29]

The latter statement reflects the gnostic conviction that those destined to be saved are sons of and from heaven, sons of the heavenly "perfect man" who, for this sect which adopted the Gospel Jesus, also came to earth in the person of Christ to bring nourishing bread to the world [55, 6-14]—although this, too, is a mythical concept, like Prometheus bringing fire. Later [75, 21-25], through baptism and the ritual cup of wine and water, the initiate is said to receive the "perfect man" into himself. These are mystical ideas similar to those of Paul in his 'baptism into Christ' and the 'body of Christ.' We can regard them both as drawn from a common pool. The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* sums up:

Intellectually considered, the Gnostic 'primal man' finds its origin in the microcosm-macrocosm idea according to which the structure of the cosmos is understood after the analogy of a man....[T]his man is partly spiritualised into a universal pleroma and partly focused on a central hypostasis within this pleroma.

In other words, the ancient anthropomorphizing trend in constructing a spiritual world (and we still, of course, do the same today), has created a heavenly "man" as the offshoot of God. He is both the prototype and the idealization of humanity, and is a key cog in the heavenly wheel, the "pleroma." He has not only given rise to mankind but in the end saves it as well.

The Heavenly Man in Judaism

There are those who protest against early Christian dependence on pagan ideas, pointing instead to elements in the Jewish heritage which contributed to Paul's thinking. To some extent, they are correct, but fail to take into account that much of this heritage was itself an earlier product of outside influence, whether from Egypt, Persia or Hellenism. Jewish apocalyptic, for example, says Kurt Rudolph (*The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, p.282-3), "did not come into existence without the contribution of Iranian-Zoroastrian religious ideas. These include above all the idea of the eschatological judgment, the resurrection of the dead, the scheme of the ages, and dualism."⁷³ Howard Kee (*Community of the New Age: Studies in Mark*, p. 130) notes: "As F. H. Borsch has shown, the notion of a Primal Man, whose conflict with the powers of chaos and darkness at first ends in defeat, from which he is delivered and exalted on a divine throne, manifests itself in the mythologies of Babylon, Tyre, and Canaan, and influenced not only the Israelite concept of kingship, but the cultic and prophetic traditions as well." No nation is so insulated that it does not syncretize to some degree with its neighbors or build upon its predecessors. Nor any religion.

The idea of a heavenly man is found in Jewish sectarian writings in the 1st century. In the Similitudes of Enoch 46:1, a "Son of Man" stands beside God:

And there [in heaven] I saw One [God] who had a head of days, and his head was white like wool, and with him was another being whose countenance had the appearance of a man, and his face was full of graciousness, like one of the holy angels. And I asked the angel who went with me and showed me all the hidden things, concerning that Son of Man, who he was, and whence he was, and why he went with the Head of Days. And he answered and said unto me: "This is the Son of Man who hath righteousness....This Son of Man whom you have seen is the One who would remove the kings and the mighty ones from their comfortable seats and the strong ones from their thrones....For they do not extol and glorify him, and neither do they obey him, the source of their kingship."

An evolution from Daniel 7 where the "one like a son of man" was either symbolic of the righteous of Israel or a champion angel representing them, the figure of the Son of Man in the Similitudes has become a concrete heavenly figure destined for an eschatological role on earth. In that respect (though he is not a sacrificial figure) he is in the same category as Paul's presentation of Christ expected at the End-time. We may also place in that category the Son of Man who appears in the early stages of the Q document, as preached by the Kingdom of God movement in Galilee in the mid 1st century. As we shall see in Division

Two, this figure at that time was an eschatological judge expected from heaven, in the same vein as that of the Similitudes, and not identified with anyone on earth; he was only later merged with the fictional Jesus of Nazareth of Mark.

Another heavenly Man appears in the Jewish sectarian document 4 Ezra, from the late 1st century CE.

And it came to pass after seven days that I dreamed a dream by night: and I beheld, and lo! There arose a violent wind from the sea, and stirred all its waves. And I beheld, and lo! The wind caused to come up out of the heart of the seas as it were the form of a man. And I beheld, and lo! This Man flew with the clouds of heaven.

The latter motif indicates a derivation from Daniel 7, but we also find a use of the Danielic clouds motif in Paul's presentation of Christ arriving from Heaven at the End-time in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17. The Book of Revelation (14:14) also contains a similar Son of Man figure drawn directly from Daniel, with no link made to an historical man anywhere in the document. All of these expressions of a heavenly man, often referred to as a Son of Man, represent a Jewish branch of the Primal Man concept which was so prolific in the ancient world. The Pauline version (though Paul does not use the term "Son of Man") was simply one aspect of that widespread mythology.

The Jewish Heavenly Man or Son of Man probably evolved, under the influence of Daniel 7, from earlier mythology regarding angelic delegates and messengers from God. They were the original medium of God's revelation and the instrument by which he controlled and communicated with the world. In early books of the Hebrew bible, these messengers are designated "the angel of the Lord" (e.g., Gen. 22:11-12, Exod. 23:20-23). Following the Babylonian Exile and its Zoroastrian influence, primary angels (archangels) began to emerge, with names like Gabriel and Michael. The latter became the official guardian of Israel. For Jewish mythology of the post-exilic period, these intermediary angels were in part a Hebrew equivalent to the Primal Man concept in other nations.

There is evidence that these angels not only evolved into a Heavenly Man, but into Christ himself. Justin Martyr regarded scriptural references to the Angel of God to be referring to Christ in his pre-incarnation state (as in Dialogue with Trypho, 75). As seen earlier (note 42), a fragment of the lost Gospel of the Ebionites may preserve a pre-Gospel tradition about the derivation of Jesus:

They say that he (Christ) was not begotten of God the Father, but created as one of the archangels...that he rules over the angels and all the creatures of the Almighty, and that he came and declared, as their Gospel, which is called... [preserved in Epiphanius *Haer.* 30. 16, 4f]

This may indicate that the idea of Christ in some circles emerged as a superior angel, later to evolve into the Son of God and given rule over the angelic host. We may hear an echo of this in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, in which justification is provided for regarding the "Son" as "superior to the angels" through a series of biblical prooftexts.

Philo's Heavenly Man

In Philo of Alexandria, we have a Jewish philosopher who, though influenced by Platonism, presents us with his own heavenly man concept. As always, his starting point is scripture. Here he had invaluable, if unintended, help from the compilers of the Book of Genesis. Centuries earlier those editors had found themselves with two different creation stories on their hands, both old, from different parts of the nation. They ended up largely juxtaposing them in the first two chapters of the bible's opening book. And so someone like Philo could read these two separate statements in the sacred writings:

Then God said: Let us make man in our image....So God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him. (Genesis 1:26-27)

Then the Lord God formed a man [or Adam] from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. (Genesis 2:7)

What better evidence that God was a Platonist? For the first statement, in Genesis 1, surely described the creation of the Platonic *Idea* of man, the spiritual prototype in heaven. He was part of the creation of the whole "intelligible world" (the one known by intellectual understanding), that upper realm of ideal, perfect things of which the lower world of matter, the "perceivable world" (the one known by the senses) was only an imperfect copy.

Genesis 2, on the other hand, recounted the creation of the ideal man's copy, made out of the dust of matter. It is the earlier—spiritual—man who is said to be made "in the image of God," and this fitted the Platonic conception of God's emanations forming the first "being" apart from himself, his direct image, his "first-born." Philo sometimes identifies his heavenly man with his general term "Logos" which he uses for the sum of God's primary emanations and powers that work on the universe. To quote Philo's own words:

There are two kinds of men. The one is Heavenly Man, the other earthly. The Heavenly Man being in the image of God has no part in corruptible substance, or in any earthly substance whatever; but the earthly man was made of germinal matter which the writer [of Genesis] calls "dust." For this reason he does not say that the Heavenly Man was created, but that he was stamped with the image of God, whereas the earthly man is a creature and not the offspring of the Creator. (*Allegorical Interpretation of the Law* 1,31, translated by C. H. Dodd.)

In speaking of God's "image," Philo is not referring to anthropomorphic characteristics, for God possesses no "shape" and certainly not a human one. Elsewhere, Philo says that "the word 'image' refers to the mind which is the governor of the soul." He regards the earthly material copy of the Heavenly Man as a replica only in an internal way, sharing the higher divinity—and being ultimately a copy of God himself—only in regard to his soul, not his outward appearance. The Heavenly Man is incorporeal and incorruptible, neither male nor female; he remains transcendent in heaven with God.⁷⁴

We do not know if Paul was familiar with Philo's writings; the latter's ideas, perhaps expounded by more than himself, were probably 'in the air' of the time in Jewish circles of the Levant in which Paul moved. In any case, Paul almost certainly did not have it in mind to either borrow or refute the philosophy of Philo (let alone 2nd century Gnosticism). But in looking at commonalities and contrasts between him and any other system of thought, we can cast light on the background to Paul's concepts, as well as make the point that, despite his innovations, neither was Paul completely original nor were his beliefs uniquely heaven-sent. Philo is generally interpreted as keeping his Logos and other conceptions abstract, rather than treating them as mythological figures, but this does not mean that Paul and his circle could not have moved beyond such an abstraction and supplied the innovation of a heavenly man who had a real existence and functioned in a cosmological and soteriological manner.

Paul's Heavenly Man

Our bottom line is that Paul's ideas about Christ as "man" with "flesh" and a "body" cannot ignore the pervasive features in religious cosmology that filled the world around him. We have seen many contexts in which Paul uses the words "flesh" and "body" in regard to his Christ which cannot refer simply to a human being on earth, but rather to something mystical and cosmic—real within its own dimension. We must bring that kind of thinking to his references to Christ as "man."

The first of those passages is Romans 5:12-15 in which Adam is set against Christ: the first responsible for bringing sin and death into the world, the second for effecting salvation from it and granting eternal life. Here Paul is interested in setting up an antithesis, a type and an antitype. He calls Adam "a type/pattern of the one to come." And:

...For if by the transgression of the one [Adam] the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many.

In this carefully balanced antithesis, since Adam is the first "man" it serves Paul's purpose to also refer to Christ as a "man." (The writer of 1 Timothy 2:5 simply follows his lead.) He can do this by drawing on the established concept of the heavenly man. Moreover, the juxtaposition of these two kinds of "men" is made easier by the fact that Adam himself, while regarded as historical, was in rabbinic thought treated in mythological fashion. Robin Scroggs (*The Last Adam*, p.121) notes that Philo describes Adam in larger than life terms:

The first man was created with a uniquely superior body. He was of giant size and his senses were more perceptive than those of present mankind. He was the one man truly 'beautiful and good' in body as well as soul. In *De opificio mundi* 136-38, there are clear echoes of rabbinic logia about the size of Adam, his creation from the pure placet of the earth, and the title, 'hallah of the world.'

Paul, in the Romans 5:12-15 passage, shows no sign that Jesus' incarnated humanity poses any problem on the supposed grounds that he, being descended '*kata sarka*' from Adam, should have been a party to the sin and death inheritance as well, something which would have compromised Paul's antithesis by giving Jesus one foot in Adam's camp. In fact, at the opening of this passage (v. 12), he says: "Just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all have sinned..." This should have required an exception for Jesus of Nazareth to specify that not only had he not sinned, his death was not due to the consequence of Adam's transgression. Paul seems oblivious to these complications.

Paul continues his antithesis in 1 Corinthians 15:21-22:

For since by a man (came) death, also by a man (comes) the resurrection of the dead. [The verbs here need to be supplied by the translator.] For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.

Again, Paul conceives and presents this contrast, this type-antitype, by drawing on the parallel conceptions of human man (Adam) and heavenly man (Christ). We should note the starkness of such a passage, in that no effort is made to define the latter in human terms, let alone through any identification with the historical man he is supposedly referring to. In fact, when we go on to the much more extensive contrast drawn between Adam and Christ later in this chapter of 1 Corinthians, we find that he does precisely the opposite. He defines Christ in clearly and exclusively heavenly terms.

That passage, 15:35-49, involves a description of Christ's "spiritual body." By way of introduction to it, consider Philipians 3:20:

...the Lord Jesus Christ who...will transform our **body** [*soma*] of humiliation into conformity with his glorious **body** (*to somati tes doxes autou*).

As with some of the "body" passages looked at in the previous chapter, the latter is clearly a body that is spiritual and heavenly, not part of earth, and no comparison or contrast is made to an incarnated earthly body. Christ's spiritual body will be the prototype for the transformed body of the resurrected human.

It might be asked what was the nature of that spiritual body? Unlike modern conceptions, the bodies of the gods had substance. Richard Carrier puts it this way:

The idea that souls do not have mass, that souls are not "bodies" with location, made of a material, was unusual in antiquity, unlike today. In fact, the common idea of a massless, immaterial soul is largely a product of medieval thought, though the idea already had a nascent place in Platonism and certain pagan cults. Thus it may well be that Paul and other early Christians believed that the resurrected Christ had a new 'body,' though now made of incorruptible material...it was certainly the pure homogeneous element of aether, the material of the heavens, well-known to all thinkers of the day as the only indestructible, unchanging material in the universe.⁷⁵

This passage as a whole provides evidence that the ancients did not regard the soul after death as being a disembodied thing of pure spirit. It had its own 'material' belonging to heaven. Paul lays emphasis on the *transformation* of the body after resurrection rather than its complete dissolution and replacement by something without substance. The body is raised imperishable, of a different material. (If heavenly bodies could be of spiritual material, why not crosses and nails?) Hering (*First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, p. 177) offers the same conclusion: "the resurrection body is not immaterial...[It] is not endowed with a lesser reality than the present physical body." Hering also acknowledges that Paul "denies the resurrection of the flesh," which ought to include that of Jesus.

The Physical vs. the Spiritual

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul is attempting to answer the objection that there can be no resurrection of the dead. After a number of arguments, he undertakes to answer the question: "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" His argument is that the resurrected body will not be of the same substance as the body possessed on earth. He tries a few analogies to illustrate that point, first by contrasting different types of flesh and body within the earthly realm itself, then among the celestial bodies and between those celestial bodies and earthly bodies. Finally, he arrives at the contrast between the body of Adam (representing the bodies of those still on earth) and that of Christ (representing the bodies that will be theirs following their resurrection), between what he calls the former's "natural/physical" body and the latter's "spiritual" body.

The principal thing to be observed in regard to this contrast and throughout the passage as a whole is that no mention is made of Christ's own "physical" body when he was on earth, no cognizance taken of the complications this would create for Paul's argument; and no appeal is made to Christ's own resurrection and transition from physical to spiritual as an illustration of his point. (As a corollary, of course, there is no mention of any resurrection of Christ from physical to physical as the Gospels would have it, a resurrection in flesh.)

Paul begins (v.36) by appealing to the analogy of the seed in the ground which germinates and rises to become something much more than what was planted, and in nature's great variety. To fit his death-resurrection argument, he styles the seed as something which first 'dies' in the ground before coming to life as a plant. This, biologically speaking, is not accurate, but he has thereby introduced the all-important motif of 'death in one form leading to rising in a different form' by which he is seeking to convince his readers of the viability of the idea of resurrection. It would be natural to expect from this that at some point he will offer the death and burial of Jesus of Nazareth followed by his rising in a greater state as a prime illustration of this pattern. That expectation is not met.

With the next verse, Paul shifts gears and focuses on the idea of variety in nature. After declaring that from the seed God has determined what kind of body the plant will be clothed with, he offers an analogy for such variety (switching for the moment to the word "flesh"):

³⁹Not all flesh is the same: there is one (flesh) of men, another flesh of animals, another flesh of birds, and another of fishes.

This, once again, is biologically crude, but he is reflecting popular—and scientifically uninformed—views (as in Galen), and it serves his point of making distinctions. Serving the same point is his next example of differences in the heavens and between heaven and earth, here returning to the term "bodies":

⁴⁰There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies; but the glory of the heavenly is one kind and that of the earthly another. ⁴¹And there is one kind of glory of the sun and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; and star differs from star in glory.

His distinction between the glory of celestial bodies and that of earthly ones (meaning humans) is legitimate in principle, as part of his argument that the body after resurrection possesses a glory that it did not have on earth. (The 'glory' of the earthly body may be somewhat dubious, given Paul's attitude toward flesh, but he may have in mind an inherent potential for glory within humans, as in the seed; in any case, he is crafting his analogies to suit his purposes.) But once again, where would Christ's earthly body fit into this comparison? Paul has conjured up a contrast in quality between human bodies and heavenly bodies. In any Christian thought about resurrection from one state to another, one quality to another, Jesus' own experience could hardly fail to come to mind. Yet that experience is not appealed to.

Two incidental observations. First, the distinction between the glories of the sun, the moon, and the different stars (probably in terms of their light) seems irrelevant. Paul is not saying that different humans will rise with different bodies or levels of glory in comparison with each other, so his distinctions between the celestial bodies do not serve his point, except to further play up the principle of difference itself. Since that principle applies to earth followed by heaven, not to within heaven itself, Paul's analogy at this point is imperfect.

Second, there is a common debate over how he regarded the nature of the planetary bodies (sun, moon and stars). Were they divine entities in themselves, as much religious thought of the day viewed them? (In Jewish thought the stars were often seen as angels.) We ought to assume it here, given the context. He is discussing the qualities and differences in the bodies of living beings, both physical and spiritual, humans and Christ. If the sun were merely a ball of fire, inanimate and unchanging, the comparison of such 'bodies' with those of living beings of either sort would hardly have been germane. A comparison or contrast between the body of the moon as a lump of rock and the body of a human being as a living entity would be ludicrous.

But let's go on.

⁴²So it is with the resurrection of the dead. (The body) is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; ⁴³it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. ^{44a}It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

These verses cry out for a comparison with Christ's own experience (at least as the epistles regard his resurrection). His corruptible body, suffering and dying, raised imperishable; its dishonor in the ignominy of crucifixion, exalted after death and raised to glory; the weakness he endured on earth replaced by the power he received in heaven (as in the Philippians hymn, with all bowing the knee at his name). If, on the other hand, one wishes to take Paul's remarks in the unreservedly negative sense he so often has in mind—the 'dishonor' of being in a physical body, its moral 'weakness' and susceptibility to sin—then we must wonder why he did not feel impelled to express a qualification or exception where Christ's physical body on earth was concerned.

Furthermore, considering that the foundation of Paul's soteriology is predicated on the paradigmatic parallel that what Christ underwent, we too undergo, that his experience of resurrection guarantees our future resurrection (something he had no hesitation in stating in Romans 6:5), it is inconceivable that Paul would not extend the use of that principle of parallel action to the argument he is making here: that is, we too shall go from the physical to the spiritual just as Christ did. But if that parallel experience by Christ took place only in a spiritual dimension, then Paul could make no appeal to it, since it would lack the essential ingredient of the death having taken place on earth in a physical body; it would not provide a parallel to the human's progression from physical to spiritual which he is advocating. In the Romans verse, the principle is that resurrection guarantees resurrection, with no need to qualify the nature of either party's resurrection, or that it involve identical states. But here in 1 Corinthians, the nature of the believer's resurrection is crucial—from physical to spiritual—and here Paul cannot make a comparison, since Christ's resurrection was not from physical to spiritual, since he was never in a physical state. Here the comparison between the believer and Christ, the tie that binds, exists solely in the parallel between the human's post-resurrection body and Christ's heavenly spiritual body. And it will be a restriction which Paul insists upon.

⁴⁴It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body...

An apologetic objection might be that Paul did not use the example of Christ's experience because Christ was not raised initially to a spiritual body, but rather—according to the Gospels—to another physical body (despite its ability to walk through walls and locked doors). But this raises more problems than it solves. In a context in which Paul is building on a comparison between the raised Christian and the raised Christ, such a drastic anomaly could not simply be ignored; the realization of a contradiction would be evident to any reader or listener. If Paul is saying that Christians shall be raised from physical to spiritual, and yet Christ had been raised from physical to physical, his whole discussion would be undermined. In any case, nothing Paul ever says, nor any other epistle writer, tells us that Christ was resurrected in flesh, to earth. As noted, they consistently speak of it as a resurrection *in spirit* or *to heaven*; and in the context of his own day, an historical Jesus' resurrection along such lines—from physical directly to spiritual—would have been eminently suited to Paul's argument.

The First and Last Adam

Now comes the heart of the passage, and it should first be quoted as a block. Here it is in a more-or-less literal rendition based on standard translations:

^{44b}If there is (such a thing as) a natural/physical body, there is also a spiritual (body). ⁴⁵And so it is written: "The first man, Adam, became a living soul"; the last Adam (became) a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶However, the spiritual (body) is not first; rather, the material (one), then the spiritual. ⁴⁷The first man (was) out of the earth, of earthly (material), the second man (is) out of heaven. ⁴⁸As the man of earth (was), so also (are) those of earth; and as (is) the man of heaven, so also [are/shall be?] those of heaven [or, the heavenly beings], ⁴⁹And as we bore the image of the one of earth, we shall also bear the image of the one of heaven.

There can be few passages in the epistles where scholars have been more inclined to read into the bare words all that they wish to see in them. The first thing to note is that there is a lot of ambiguity in this passage, for Paul has left out almost all the verbs. Some of those supplied are natural, but read the passage without the words in brackets and one can see how much critical ambiguity resides in the sense of it all. Translators tend to use verbs and prepositions which connote the idea of Christ as someone who recently came from heaven down to earth, fitting the Gospel presentation. (As Hering puts it, Christ "descended from heaven.") But the Greek words convey no necessary sense of movement. We can compare a similar common misreading of the earlier 15:21:

For since it was a man who brought death into the world, a man also brought resurrection of the dead. [NEB]

Here the verbs are supplied by the translators. Some have it, "by a man came resurrection of the dead." Literally, the sentence reads: "For since through a man death, also through a man resurrection of the dead." The verbs usually inserted convey the sense of some recent event on earth. Yet the next verse, 22, actually points to the future: "So in Christ all will be brought to life...when he comes." This removes any necessity in this passage to see the resurrection of humans as effected by a recent historical event; the 'raising' of Christ (verse 20) is simply a past event whose benefits are coming into effect in the present and future.

But the most critical mistranslation occurs in the later passage, in verse 45:

The first man, Adam, became a living soul; the last Adam (became) a life-giving spirit.

The verb "became" (*egeneto*) governs both parts, the references to both Adam and Christ. Yet the English "became" is misleading, for it suggests a conversion from one thing, one state, to another. This is indeed one of the meanings of "*ginomai*" but it cannot be so here, for such a concept cannot apply to Adam. Paul must mean *ginomai* in the more fundamental of its senses, that of "coming into existence as," to form the nature of, for he surely means that Adam was *created as* "a living soul" (just as the Genesis passage he is quoting does). He is

defining Adam here, not speaking of a change from one state into another. The preposition "*eis*" need not denote "into" in the sense of conversion, but has more the sense of "as" in a predicate accusative phrase, like 1 Maccabees 11:62: "He took the sons as [or, to be] hostages."

It follows that the second half of the verse (where the verb is only understood) should imply the same thing: that Christ is of the nature of a life-giving spirit, not that he went from some previous state to another state. Yet the latter is the way scholars like to interpret it—indeed, they are forced to do so: their preconceptions about an historical Jesus require them to maintain that Paul is referring to Jesus' changed state after his resurrection, when he had taken on a spiritual body, even if this is not borne out by the text or its context. Hering (*op.cit.*, p.175) is the only commentator I have seen who provides what I suggest is the proper sort of translation:

The first Adam was created to have a living nature, the second Adam to be a life-giving spirit.

This removes any implied reference to the resurrection of Christ. It also removes Christ from any association with a previous life on earth, which is the stark reality of this passage when read without bringing Gospel understandings to it. The latter, naturally, has been the consistent recourse. Scroggs, for example (*op.cit.*, p.88), designates that it is "Christ's *resurrected* body" (his emphasis) which is in view, even though Paul nowhere makes any such specification, nor does his argument make allowance for the consequences of such a distinction.

Now we can resume taking the passage apart.

^{44b}If there is (such a thing as) a natural/physical body, there is also a spiritual (body).

Paul is about to define the exemplars and compositions of those two contrasting bodies. *And he does so in terms of Adam and Christ.* But Christ, according to the historicist view, was both, first one then the other. Paul's presentation is stymied from the outset, because everything he says about Christ in heaven in opposition to Adam on earth is compromised—if not foiled—by Christ having been on earth and ostensibly part of the Adam side of the equation. In actuality, he deals with Christ only in terms of a heavenly definition and composition. Nor is it a feasible 'out' to claim that Paul's readers understood the unspoken dimension. What competent writer and careful crafter of his ideas about a critical subject like this one is going to settle for that, especially when everything could be clarified by a simple phrase, words to the effect that he is speaking of Christ's body not on earth but only after his resurrection? Why would he blithely assume that no confusion or misunderstanding about the subtleties of what he is anxious to get across would be raised in any of his readers' minds, a confusion compounded in virtually every verse still to come?

⁴⁵So also it is written: [using Hering's translation] "The first (man) Adam was created to have a living nature, the second [or last] Adam to be a life-giving spirit."

Following on the preceding phrase (44b)—"If there is (such a thing as) a natural/physical body, there is also a spiritual (body)" which presents the two contrasting bodies *per se*—verse 45 sets forth the two entities which are to be assigned to each side of that pair, Adam to the physical side, Christ to the spiritual side. Thus the statement propounds a clear exclusivity; each of those figures is assigned to its own side and to only its own side. The statement would fall apart, it would entail a contradiction, if Christ had ever been assigned to the physical side.

Adam is the first (human) man, and Paul, to keep his antithesis as precise as possible, styles Christ the "last (or second) Adam." We can assume that this is Paul's own touch, his poetic invention, because as Hering points out (*op.cit.*, p. 178), "This doctrine of the two Adams is found neither in Jewish apocalyptic, nor in the Talmud, nor in the Gospels, nor in Hellenistic or Mandaeen speculations on Anthropos." Pre-Christian sources would, of course, not have a doctrine of two Adams involving Christ, but from all this silence we can deduce, as Hering has done, that Paul was not building on or adapting an existing idea. In any case, there would be nothing to prevent Paul from applying the second side of his antithesis of "first Adam - last Adam" to a heavenly man. An earthly man could be supplanted by a heavenly man, particularly when we see that the latter is being portrayed in precisely such divine terms. In Hebrews, we will see a heavenly sacrifice supplanting an earthly one.

In the following verse, the exclusivity of each side of Paul's antithesis is reaffirmed, but with a special qualification:

⁴⁶But the spiritual (body) did not come first, but rather the physical (body came first), afterwards the spiritual.

Once more, a strict separation between the spiritual body (Christ) and the physical body (Adam) is in view. But imagine the complication that would be inherent and require addressing if Christ had lived on earth: "The physical body in the figure of Adam came first, but then came the spiritual body in the figure of Christ—although I haven't mentioned that between them came another physical body in the figure of Christ incarnated on earth, which you have to understand but ignore and moreover divorce from what I say about physical bodies in relation to Adam and what I am about to say in relation to the stuff that Christ was made of and whose likeness we will bear and—"

Pity Paul's poor readers.

But there is a question to do with this verse. Who, if anyone, was maintaining that the spiritual body came first? Why does Paul seem to be concerned with denying such a view? Who or what *was* the spiritual body that might have been claimed to come first? Scholars have suggested two interpretations. Barrett (*op.cit.*, p.373-4), although he has not posed those direct questions, suggests that the idea was based on "the various speculations about a Primal Man, Archetypal Man, Heavenly Man," a concept that was diverse, with "consistency" only being "achieved when the speculations could be focused upon and interpreted by a historical figure." But no such focus or interpretation is ever spotlighted by Paul

or any other epistle writer; no historical figure is entered into the equation unless we import him there from the Gospels, which is what Barrett has done. But he at least recognizes the possibility of a link between that broad speculative "Man" in the philosophy of the day and the figure of Paul's Christ.

Hering offers a somewhat different suggestion (*op.cit.*, p. 179): "Christ is considered as the Second Man, head of a new humanity (whose) existence goes back to the time before creation." In other words, he says, Paul is reflecting his view of Christ's pre-existence, although Hering compromises this suggestion by saying that 15:46 shows that "His appearance on earth is later than that of the first Adam."

But is that what Paul means by verse 46? He certainly does not state it as such. If the final words of the verse were to mean an appearance on earth, why did he not introduce such a thing in all those previous verses where it was conspicuous by its absence, where its introduction was desperately needed to avoid confusion? Hering is clearly not cognizant of the problems which such an introduction would have created.

Curiously, by stating blandly that "the spiritual did not come first," Paul is contradicting his own view of the pre-existent Christ, who predated the physical Adam. One must surmise, then, that the heavenly Christ is being slotted into 'second' place after Adam specifically in regard to the process of salvation and general resurrection Paul is presenting. In terms of the introduction of sin and death, and the subsequent rescue from the consequences proceeding from Adam's fall, Christ *follows* Adam. Paul is simply ordering his pieces according to the needs of his presentation, his concern to present Adam the bringer of death prior to his Christ the bringer of eternal life.

But this is equally applicable to a mythicist interpretation as to an historicist one. As will be seen in other contexts, Christ is brought into play at the time of his revelation, not of his actions; he 'appears' at the time when those actions and their benefits are revealed and the latter come into effect. And that, as he consistently presents it throughout his letters, is in Paul's own present time of faith and the Christian movement which he sees himself as spearheading, himself as the recipient of God's revelation about the Son and his redeeming acts and the one charged with putting the new salvation into effect.

But in fact the mythicist option is *more* than "equally applicable." If Paul had in mind the life and death of Jesus on earth as representing the "spiritual" which comes after the "physical" (Adam), this would entail an obvious contradiction. The life and death of Jesus on earth could never be styled as the coming of Christ's "spiritual" self. In anyone's eyes, it would primarily be yet another "natural/physical" manifestation, a human incarnated body, and thus could not fit Paul's statement and pattern. In anyone's eyes, it would have been Christ *in his physical self*, on earth, who had brought salvation and a conquest of the death produced by Adam. Whatever Paul has in mind by his positioning of Christ as 'following' Adam, it cannot be a reference to Christ on earth, because he has made it clear that such a position *is occupied by a spiritual entity*.

Barrett tries to get around this glaring anomaly by suggesting (*op.cit.*, p.375) that the "spiritual" Christ following Adam is a reference to the *eschatological* Christ, the Jesus who, identifiable with the Philonic-type Heavenly Man, will come at the end of time. If so, this leaves a huge gap in the middle. What of the incarnated Jesus who appeared on earth during that hiatus? Would Paul leave him twisting in the wind out in the barren wilderness, contributing nothing to the process of salvation, not even worthy of the barest mention? Indeed, Paul presents this end-time Christ as though nothing *has* intervened. Scripture and his own supplement to it in verse 45 point solely to those two ends of the process. Intervening stages are missing here just as they are missing everywhere else, whether in the progression from the old age to the new, or from God's promises to Paul's Gospel, or between the divine secrets kept hidden for long generations and their present revelation to apostles like himself.

Barrett's interpretation is in fact supported by the earlier passage in 1 Corinthians 15:21-23. Verses 22 and 23 say, as we have seen:

For since by a man (came) death, also by a man (comes) the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all *will be* made alive.

If the Gospels are not read into this passage, then we can see once again the gap existing between the past in Adam and the future in Barrett's eschatological Christ who will bring resurrection of the dead at his coming. And in fact, if we look closely at the language of other passages we see similar cases of two ends with no figure of an historical Jesus in evidence in between. In Romans 5:15, "many died by the sin of the one man," but it is "God's grace and gift" which have arrived in the present, not Christ himself. If it had been the latter, the "gift" would have been seen as coming from him, rather than from God (the latter is clarified in verse 16: see the NEB and NIV, also the TNT). The gift "in the grace of the one man Jesus Christ" identifies the *means* by which God has granted the gift, but that means is not necessarily identified with the present time. The phrase has the same sense as the "in Christ" so frequent in Pauline expression, a phrase which does not signify the presence of Jesus on earth but is descriptive of a spiritual condition in people in relation to Christ and of the processes of God.

We have here a subtle distinction, but it is identifiable in many places when one knows to look for it. (Other examples will be examined in the following chapters.) It was found in 1 Corinthians 15:22 just quoted. There, despite slanted translations, Paul does not say that Christ "brought" resurrection of the dead, as though by a recent historical appearance or action. The bringing of resurrection is located in the future; and the raising of Christ from the dead as the "firstfruits" (verse 20 and 23) is nowhere identified as a recent historical happening. We have seen and will continue to see the difficulty, if not impossibility, of inserting it with such an assumption into the background of passages like 15:44-49.

We can further observe the problematic consequence for Barrett in his attempted solution of identifying the second Man, the "spiritual body," as the coming "eschatological" Christ at the Parousia. Is he perturbed by the void staring out at us regarding the supposed previous coming of Christ in a "physical

body"? Evidently not, for he dismisses it with this comment: "It is not part of Paul's argument here to say that the heavenly man has already come in the form of earthly man." This, of course, solves nothing, and fails even to recognize the problem. Barrett like so many others has managed to close his mind to the impossibility of Paul making such a statement which gives no allowance, stated or unstated, for any previous "coming" of this eschatological man. Earlier (p.353) Barrett has admitted that in 15:22 Paul speaks of neither Adam's nor Christ's activities specifically in terms of historical events. Yet he says: "As Paul knew, this event had happened very recently, and its character as an historical event raised no doubt or problem in his mind." But Barrett is attributing his own assumed knowledge to Paul, and because he himself has failed to perceive the consequent problems, he attributes the same lack of concern to the apostle. His ability to read such a mind even at a two millennia distance, and to absolve it of concerns it never had an inkling of, is clearly an invaluable asset in dealing with the anomalies in such passages.

Heavenly Stuff and Earthly Stuff

Alleged ideas lurking 'between the lines' might be one thing; but outright statements which make no room between those lines is another. Resuming our examination at 15:47:

⁴⁷The first man (was) out of the earth, of earthly (material), the second man (is) out of heaven.

Paul is stating the composition of each of his 'men.' The first man Adam was made of earthly stuff. In the Greek, he was "*ek ges xoikos*": literally, 'out of earth, earthy'; the final word is a predicate nominative describing the "man." There is no movement or originating location here; not even a verb is specified. Adam does not come 'out of anything in the sense of arriving or being from a place, but rather is 'out of in the sense of constituent material. Translations rightly render it something like "made of the dust of the earth" (NEB). But the second half of the verse is usually subjected to a 180 degree turn: it is alleged to mean that Christ is *from* heaven. In the Greek, the second man (is) "*ex ouranou*." Again, no verb. But although there is no corresponding word to "earthy" which for Adam designated his constituent material, we must take the same meaning in regard to Christ, that what is meant is that Christ is made of the constituent material of heaven, whatever that is conceived to be. There would have been no precise corresponding word with such a direct connotation available, and "*ex ouranou*" is allowed to stand for it.

For a number of reasons, one cannot accept the standard meaning accorded this phrase, that it means Christ was "out of heaven" in the sense of his place of origin, implying a movement to earth from it. One is that the heavenly Christ, the "spiritual body" of him, is never said to have come to earth. That "second man" has been defined as spiritual. He is to come only in the future, in Barrett's "eschatological man." To read some sudden and unprecedented reference here to Christ in his previous physical state incarnated on earth would have no place in

the presentation, and would introduce irresolvable complications. Moreover, the statement follows as a parallel to the statement about Adam. That statement is clearly a reference to Adam's constituent material; the one about Christ ought therefore to be the same. Thus the entire context of these verses, including the following one, is about the nature of the respective men, physical body and spiritual body, not their origins or their movements.

Thus we have Paul defining Christ solely in terms of his spiritual body. To claim that he could do this while making not the slightest nod toward his former physical body on earth is beyond the bounds of the intelligible. Furthermore, and perhaps the most telling observation of all, if Paul is styling Jesus as the "last (or second) Adam," would he not have been so in his physical state on earth? Indeed, he would have been a precise counterpart to Adam: on earth, in flesh. That would have been the natural association to any idea of him being a second Adam, especially one who had "come" to reverse Adam's earlier death-dealing precedent. Paul, of course, needs a *spiritual* Christ in a spiritual body, a product of heaven, to serve as the prototype for humans' resurrection bodies. But calling him the last Adam to serve that purpose would be trampled by our elephant in the room: Christ on earth as being the more natural "last Adam" in his *physical* state. That monumental inconsistency should have precluded Paul from creating the analogy of the two Adams in the first place. After all, he could have avoided all these problems by simply proposing that the resurrection body Christians will assume after death will be the same as the resurrection body of Christ in heaven following his death on earth in a physical body, that Christ himself had undergone the very process from physical to spiritual which Paul is claiming for his believers. Such a sequence and contrast with Adam would have worked equally well—indeed better—had he just laid out all of it on the table.

Instead, he concludes his argument with a final adamant focus on the heavenly constituency of Christ, and the rigidly separated correspondences of humans with Adam on the one hand and Christ on the other:

*⁸ AS the man of earth (was), so also (are) those of earth; and as (is) the man of heaven, so also [are/shall be?] those of heaven [or the heavenly beings], 'And as we bore the image of the one of earth, we shall also bear the image of the one of heaven.

That we also bore the physical image of the one of heaven *while he was on earth* is a thought that does not seem to have occurred to Paul.

The difficulty which scholars face in regard to Paul's Heavenly Man can be measured by their efforts to construct some explanation which could make sense of it. Robin Scroggs (*op.cit.*, p.100f) recognizes that Paul calls Christ "man" even in a spiritual body in heaven, and so Scroggs is led to define Christ's heavenly nature as "human," and to define "human" as the post-resurrection destiny of human beings after the End, using phrases like "eschatological humanity" and "true man." None of these rescue measures can be derived from anything Paul actually says.

Part Five

VIEWS THROUGH THE WINDOW IN SCRIPTURE

15

"Born of Woman"?

The single verse most appealed to in support of Paul's knowledge of an historical Jesus is probably Galatians 4:4, containing the double phrase "born of woman, born under the Law" (referring to the Jewish Law of the Hebrew bible, the Torah). There are two ways to approach this passage: one, assuming the double phrase as authentic to Paul; the other, questioning its authenticity and judging the likelihood of interpolation. We will look at the passage as a whole, for there is much more at stake here than the fate of those phrases. Regardless in which direction one leans, there are some revealing things to discover, with widespread implications. Here is the NEB translation, with some elements of my own:

⁴Then in the fullness of time, God sent his Son, born of woman, born under the Law,

⁵in order that he might purchase freedom for the subjects of the Law, so that we might attain the status of sons.

⁶And because you are sons, God (has) sent into our hearts the Spirit of his Son, crying 'Father!'

⁷YOU are therefore no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then also by God's act an heir.

The Sending of the Son

"God sent [the verb *exapostello*] his Son." This verb of sending is used in the Old Testament in connection with the sending of spiritual beings, such as angels, or personified Wisdom as in the Wisdom of Solomon 9:10. The basic form of the verb, *apostello*, is regularly used to denote the sending of the Holy Spirit. (The verb and its variants can also be used to speak of 'sending' a person.) The identical form of the verb in verse 4, "God *sent* his Son," is also used in verse 6 to say that "God *sent* into our hearts the Spirit of his Son." This is an aorist tense, placing both these actions in the past.

Some translations of the verb in verse 6 render it in the perfect tense: "God *has sent* into our hearts..." But this can be misleading. The question is, are the two thoughts, the two "sent" actions, more or less contemporary? Might they essentially be complementary parts of the same process? By using a perfect tense in verse 6, translators set up a "God sent...God has sent," sequence, as though the second is separate and later than the first, the former representing the advent of Jesus and his life on earth, the latter the installation of his Spirit into Paul's converts a generation later, in the present time. But if the two 'sendings' are essentially contemporary, Paul would be relating both to the time of his own activities. The sending in both cases would apply only to the spiritual aspect of the Son. Both these verses, then, would represent the arrival of the spiritual Christ within the current phenomenon of divine revelation and Paul's concept of "Christ in you." This spiritual knowledge and presence of Christ in Paul's time have brought with them a new freedom from the Law granted by God, and those who are "in Christ" have achieved the "status of sons." There need be nothing here that refers to an historical life or act of Christ on earth.

Let's see how well such a reading can be supported.

We should not ignore the fact that Paul has failed to refer here to any event of death and resurrection, historical or mythical. It is not, "God sent his son to die on Calvary and rise from his tomb," or even "God sent his son to die on the cross and to rise from death," which could in the latter case allow placement in a mythical dimension. Rather he says:

...God sent his Son...in order that he might purchase freedom for the subjects of the Law...

I have temporarily dropped the contentious "born" phrases, so that we can see the main train of thought in the sentence. Note that with or without the phrases, the antecedent of "he" (the one who purchases freedom) could grammatically be either God or the Son. Usually, it is the Son who is assumed to purchase freedom, but this may well be a significant misreading.

What Paul is focusing on in this passage is the specific transition of the believer from being under the Law to being free of it; from being a "slave" to being a "son." This has been his focus in the preceding chapter 3 of Galatians. And at what point has this transition from Law to freedom, from slave to son, taken place? The fact is, it has not been at the point of Jesus' sacrificial act, regardless of whether that was historical or mythical. Paul locates it at quite a different point. Here is his thought a few verses earlier in chapter 3:

²³Before faith came we were held prisoner by the Law until faith should be revealed...²⁵Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the Law.

The intervening verse 24 has been translated in either of two ways: "...the Law was our tutor until Christ came," but this contradicts the thought in the two flanking verses which say that it is "faith" that has come. The other is preferable: "the Law has become our tutor (leading us) to Christ," which is literally what the

Greek says. The latter phrase could be taken in a number of ways: leading us to learning about or faith in Christ, or leading us to the time when Christ arrived—either in body, spirit, or the revelation of him. The King James Version, for example, translates: "The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith."

Thus, even when Christ had performed his act of sacrifice, whether historical or mythical, we were still under the Law, still slaves, not yet sons of God. All this was not to change *until* the time when faith was brought to the new believer, through the preaching of Paul and other apostles of the Christ.⁷⁶

This locating of key processes only in Paul's own present is a situation which is surprisingly frequent in the epistles, but easy to miss when one is bringing Gospel preconceptions to them. Time after time we find an exclusive focus on the apostolic movement as the key moment of the present period—seemingly its *only* moment—with Jesus suspended somewhere in an indeterminate dimension, communicating with humans and having the consequences of his shadowy acts brought into the light and into effect only with the preaching of the gospel by the likes of Paul. To call it curious—this relegation of the vivid events of Calvary and the empty tomb to some opaque no man's land from which they never seem to emerge into focus—would be an understatement.

If we allow the thought of 3:23-25 to govern what follows (as it should, else Paul is contradicting himself), we arrive at this scenario: 4:4-5, which involves God 'sending' his Son, is focused on the act—God's act—of producing the transition from Law to freedom. Paul locates that transition at the time of faith, which is to say the time of the response to his own and other apostles' preaching; the freedom comes at this time of faith. But the idea of the sending is tied to the act of purchasing freedom, it is a part of it; and so the two are contemporary.

It is crucial to make this clear. The meaning is: "God sent his Son in order that he, God, could purchase freedom from the Law." The sending makes possible the purchase. The purchase takes place in Paul's time, the time of faith; therefore, the sending ought to take place during the same time as the purchase. Otherwise, we would have a meaning like this: "God sent his Son to earth to die and rise, and then a few decades later he, God, has purchased freedom for those who have faith in response to Paul." A curious sequence and a curious thing to say. Whereas, it makes perfect sense for Paul to say: "God sent his Son (the spirit of him, just as Wisdom or the Holy Spirit were sent) into the world through revealing him (as all the epistles say), setting in motion a preaching and faith movement through which God purchases freedom from the Law for believers."

Thus the "sent" of verse 4 does not refer to any arrival of the Son on the earthly scene some decades earlier. Rather, the sending of verse 4 is the sending of the Son *during the time of Paul*. This can only mean through revelation into minds like his ("God revealed his son in me," as he has said in 1:16), enabling him to bring knowledge of the Son to others ("in order that I might preach him among the nations") and produce the "faith" within them which brings about that freedom from the Law and confers upon them the status of sons.

What has happened in this process is not that the *acts* of Jesus have just taken place, but the *effects* of them have come into play, through their revelation and their acceptance by believers. Just as the common idea of God 'sending the Holy Spirit' refers to knowledge and inspiration sent from him through that Holy Spirit, God 'sending his Son' has a similar meaning: knowledge of Jesus and his acts—and their effects—have been carried to humanity by the Son himself as his Spirit enters the world and makes itself known. Paul regards himself as the centerpiece recipient and promulgator of such revelation.

This explains why Paul, as he so consistently does throughout his letters, has focused entirely on his own work and left the work of Jesus in some outer darkness. It is why he and others so consistently talk as though Jesus has become known and brought into visibility only by God and revelation—with Paul and others like him as the medium for both. It explains all those 'revelation' verbs like *phaneroo*, *apokalupto*, *emphanidzo* used to describe Jesus' 'manifestation' on earth—instead of saying that he was incarnated or lived a life. If the sending is of Christ as Spirit (which is what Paul then says outright in verse 6), there is no 'action' by Christ at this time which purchases freedom, and thus God remains the subject of "to purchase freedom for the subjects of the Law." It is by putting into effect the revelation of his Son, the long-hidden secret ("mystery") of which the epistles regularly speak, that God has set in motion the freeing of people from the Law and their adoption as sons through the work of Paul. Here Christ is essentially a passive figure.

The Work of God

It must be pointed out that Paul also envisions, and elsewhere states, that it is Jesus' act of sacrifice which has *enabled* freedom from the Law. A short time earlier, in Galatians 3:13, he has said "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us." This is the primary act which is drawn on by God when he brings about the application of that freedom. But again, the specific point of the *application* of this freedom is not stated to be the actual time of the sacrifice. The cessation of the enslavement to the Law comes only in the time of Paul. And this coming of faith has been the act and responsibility of God, through revelation and the work of apostles like Paul, acting on God's call.

This is the manner in which the epistles describe the salvation workings of the present time. It is all God's work, revealing Christ his Son and making available the benefits of his sacrifice. It is why the epistles are so unexpectedly theocentric and scripture oriented, with no role in the present spelled out for Jesus except to have himself "manifested" and enter into Paul and his converts ("Christ in you"). It is why his acts are never introduced as part of the current scene. Instead, those acts, performed at some unspecified time and in an unspecified place, have created a deposit placed in Heaven's bank, an account kept under wraps by God "for long generations" but now revealed. This account has been opened for withdrawals, with the PIN number given out to those who have adopted faith in Christ Jesus.

We find this fully in keeping with the thought in verse 7: "So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and thus *by God's act*, an heir." Here it is expressly stated to be God, not Jesus, who has performed the act which makes the believer a son; this parallels and confirms the meaning in verse 4, in which it is God who has "purchase[d] freedom for the subjects of the Law," not Jesus. It has not been the death and resurrection which are the immediate cause of that freedom, and so the "God sent his Son" in verse 4 should imply no reference to a life which contained such events. (Otherwise, why did Paul not introduce them?) Rather, God is drawing on those acts to put the available freedom into effect by *revealing* the Son and what he had done. This was a revelation achieved through a new reading of scripture under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

This puts verse 6 in its proper relationship to verse 4. The two 'sendings' are two aspects of the same process, the second an extension of the first. By revealing his Son and winning believers through the work of called apostles like Paul, God has created adopted sons, freed from the Law. In adopting such faith, those believers now possess within themselves the Spirit of the Son, who expresses his hosts' new relationship with God by "crying: 'Abba, Father!'"

Nor will this need to change if we include the phrases "born of woman, born under the Law" as authentic to the text.

This picture of Paul presenting God as sending his Son in the sense of his revelation to humanity fits with every other reference in the epistles to the 'coming' of Christ in the present time (compare, for example, Romans 3:25), offering a "now" figure who speaks from scripture rather than a "then" figure of the past. That an entire movement from its beginning and for over half a century could have adopted such language and created such a picture if an historical Jesus had recently existed and performed those redeeming acts, whose memory lived on vividly in their minds, is quite out of the question.

In the Fullness of Time

Further support for this reading is to be found in a phrase which tends to be overlooked, the very first words of verse 4: "Then in the fullness of time..." (literally, "when came the fullness of time [*to pleroma ton chronou*]"). But what was that time? Certainly Paul does not say here, nor ever says, that it was a certain number of years ago, let alone that it was at the time of Jesus' life or crucifixion. Rather, Paul has identified what that "time" is, locating the new freedom from the Law in the time of his own preaching, the time of the revelation of the Son and the sending of his Spirit into the hearts of believers. It is that process, conducted under the direction of God and the Holy Spirit, which has occurred in "the fullness of time." Such a focus on himself is something Paul would hardly have been capable of had the shadow of Jesus' life and the cross of Calvary been looming just back over his shoulder.

We can compare this with another passage in the Pauline corpus we have looked at before, one which employs a similar idea. Even though the epistle of Titus, one of the Pastorals, was written probably half a century later, it still

preserves much of Paul's thought. In its opening verses, the writer, presenting himself as Paul, has this to say:

²...the hope of eternal life which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time [*pro chronon aionion*, examined in chapter 17],

³and now at the proper time [*kairois idiois*] he has revealed his word [NEB: openly declared himself] through the preaching entrusted to me [i.e., referring to Paul] by the command of God our Savior.

It is clear from this passage that "at the proper time"—an idea equivalent to Galatians' "in the fullness of time"—is indeed the time of revelation and the preaching entrusted to Paul. It is not the time of Jesus' arrival and acts on earth. But would any writer present the "fullness of time" as coming only with the period of Paul, rather than with the prior incarnation of the Son and his earthly career? Yet such a way of thinking is betrayed all through the epistles, such as in 1 Corinthians 10:11, "Upon us the fulfillment of the ages has come!" There Paul himself declares that all the expectations of the previous age have been focused on and come to fruition in *his* time, rather than in any life of Christ in the recent past. Titus 1:2-3 makes the same statement in Paul's name. There is no thought allowed in these verses for an earlier arrival. Between God's promises made "before the beginning of time" and the revealing of his word "at the proper time" in the preaching of Paul, no scope is available for an arrival of Christ on the earthly scene to do work of any kind, either bestowing eternal life or revealing its availability. No Christian writer would have laid out such a pattern and completely ignored an historical Jesus in the middle of it.⁷⁷

The End of the Law

But let's go back to Galatians 3:23 and consider more fully the curious way Paul has presented things. "Before faith came, we were held prisoner of the Law until faith should be revealed." In the context of an historical crucifixion some decades earlier than Paul was writing, this would be a perverse thought. If Jesus dying on the cross was the necessary act (and it was) which would bring about the setting aside of the old Law, surely any idea that the Law still held sway even *after* that historical event had happened would be unnatural. Rather, the Law would have ceased to have any force, any life in it, from that point on, even if the message about this cessation was yet to be brought to people, even if people only *assumed* that they were still under the Law until informed otherwise by Paul. Yet Paul, in 3:23, states clearly that the Law was *in effect*, it continued to make people prisoners, until *his* time, the time of revelation to apostles like himself and the bringing of faith to their converts. He never attaches any 'end' of the Law to the actual death of Jesus.

This would make perfect sense in the context of a death which had not taken place at an identifiable point in history, but in the spiritual world, something hidden for long ages, knowledge of which has only now come through God's revelation about it. In such a context, the only point that would be available to which the end of the Law's dominion could be affixed would be the point at

which the Son's sacrifice was revealed and faith in it was inaugurated. Indeed, Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4:14: "We believe Jesus died and rose again," clearly implying that not only the rising, but even the death was a matter of faith based on revelation, not historical knowledge. As well, in 1 Corinthians 15:12-16, he seems to be saying that Christians know of Jesus' resurrection through God's information about it, through faith rather than historical witness.

Paul's silence on the Law's demise at the time of the crucifixion itself seems to change somewhat in later epistles written in his name, although the texts are not completely clear on the point. Ephesians 2:15 has Christ "abolishing in his flesh the Law with its commandments and regulations." Since "flesh" here refers to his form/substance when undergoing crucifixion, and since this is followed by the statement that in his new "body" he has reconciled Jew and gentile and destroyed the barrier between them, this could, in the mind of the writer, place the end of the Law at the time of that spiritual-world event. Both these sentiments are highly mystical and could not refer to the literal flesh and body of Christ on earth. The same situation exists in Colossians 2:14 where Christ on his cross nails the Law to it, canceling its inimical regulations. This, too, is a mystical scenario, followed by a clearly spirit-realm scene in which the demon powers are disarmed and triumphantly led in some spectacle of defeat. On the other hand, who it is that does the canceling and nailing of the Law to the cross is grammatically uncertain. It could be God, although the switch to Jesus for the disarming of the powers, which seems required, is in that case virtually unrecognizable. If it is indeed God doing the canceling, this would be closer to Paul's conception and could be assigned to the time of his preaching.

The observations thus far are valid quite apart from the absence or presence of "born of woman, born under the Law." But they do have a bearing on the question of whether those phrases should be in the text, or whether they are interpolations. If by the sending of the Son in verse 4 Paul is not referring to the arrival of the person of Jesus on earth, but only to a spiritual manifestation in his time, then the idea of Christ having been "born of woman" would in this context be immaterial—even if an historical Jesus had previously lived. The "born" idea would have had no relevance to what he was saying about the present time of faith and God's purchase of freedom.

By the same token, "born under the Law" would be equally irrelevant to what was being discussed. Within the context of the Galatians passage itself, neither of these features would play any direct role. Christ is not being presented as the one who abolishes or purchases freedom from the Law. That is God himself. (It is "God's own act," as the NEB emphasizes it.) Could it be claimed that this act by God was made possible by Jesus being sent to earth in the past and being "born of woman, born under the Law"? Yet these would be quite secondary to the death and rising which are the primary acts which enable salvation. Why would Paul not put these events forward instead of the woman and Law features? In what way would being born of woman and born under the Law be items worthy of highlighting as important in this context? It would go without saying

that if Jesus had lived on earth and been crucified as a human being on Calvary, then he was "born of woman." This would contribute nothing to the primary act nor strengthen it; it would be wholly gratuitous and redundant. Since orthodox interpretation of the passage assumes that the sending of verse 4 already means the life of Christ and his saving act of death and resurrection, Paul would have had no reason to say that he was "born of woman." Thus the presence of the phrase provides a justification for suggesting interpolation.

If "born of woman" were to be set aside, "born under the Law" would almost certainly have to go with it. Besides, what could "born under the Law" have contributed to the primary acts of death and resurrection? If one tries to see any relevance for it in relation to the abolition of the Law, that too is hard to come by. In what way would Jesus being "born under the Law" be a useful or working part of the mechanism by which God has freed believers from it, which is what this passage is all about? It is the death and rising which is the redemptive means drawn on by God. It did not require Jesus to have been subject to the Torah himself. If it did, Paul should have been led to spell out that relevance. Indeed, as we shall note, Jesus being subject to the Jewish Law would have created many a complication for him.

The Source of Paul's "Woman": Isaiah 7:14?

As noted by Edward D. Burton in the *International Critical Commentary* series (1924), the two qualifying phrases, "born of woman, born under the Law" (*genomenon ek gunaikos, genomenon hupo nomon*) are descriptive of the Son, but not specifically tied to the 'sending.' Burton says [*Galatians*, p.218-19]:

The employment of the aorist [a past tense participle] presents the birth and the subjection to law as in each case a simple fact, and leaves the temporal relation to *exapesteilen* ["sent"] to be inferred solely from the nature of the facts referred to....But the phrases are best accounted for as intended not so much to express the accompaniments of the sending as directly to characterize the Son, describing the relation to humanity and the law in which he performed his mission.

For those phrases, Burton is not ruling out an understanding of an intended temporal relationship to the verb, but he is saying that it is not grammatically present (such a thing would normally be done by using the *present* participle). Yet if "born of woman, born under the Law" can be seen as *not* necessarily qualifying the sending itself, this further frees that 'sent' thought in verse 4 from having to be a reference to the arrival in the world of the incarnated Christ in a human body.

At the same time, we might suggest that this absence of a linkage between verb and participles would more likely be the product of an interpolator than Paul himself who, if he intended the phrases to qualify the "sent" idea, would normally have put the participles in the present tense rather than the aorist. An interpolator, on the other hand, would have been focused on the "fact" of these 'born' phrases to serve his own purposes, as we shall see.

Burton further notes that since "*genomenon*" (the verb *ginomai*) is not the plainest word to describe birth (see below), the meaning of "born" can only be derived from the context; moreover, it cannot be carried over automatically to the second phrase, and thus he prefers the 'safer' interpretation that Jesus was "subject to the Law" rather than 'born' under it. This would eliminate any need to understand that he was born a Jew and consequently under the Law. Taken with the fact of Burton's observation that the two participles do not have a necessary temporal relation to the verb "sent," this means that one could understand that Christ came in "subjection to Law" at some later point than birth. Burton does not offer any suggestion as to when or how this could have taken place, but it might be suggested that Paul, if he in fact included these phrases, may have envisioned Christ as taking on such features when he entered "the realm of flesh."

And what of "born of woman" itself?

A young woman is with child, and she will bear a son... [Isaiah 7:14]

This is a passage which, despite a context clearly linking the woman and her child with the time of the prophet, was widely regarded as prophetic of the Messiah. If Paul felt compelled to interpret this as a reference to his *spiritual* Messiah, he would not have refrained from offering it. Perhaps he simply assigned it to the world of myth and God's mysteries—which were unfathomable in any case, and had to be accepted on the basis of scriptural revelation; just as he accepted that the spiritual Christ was of David's stock because scripture said so. Why he would choose to introduce this mythical element here, especially without explanation, can only be a matter of speculation. In the context of Galatians 4, as noted above, there seems to be no practical necessity for either phrase, which becomes one of the arguments for interpolation.

"Born" or "Arise": *Gennad* vs. *Ginomai*

In discussing whether "born under the Law" means "by birth" (and deciding that it need not), Burton says:

Had the apostle desired to express the idea of 'born' in both phrases, he could have done so unambiguously by the use of *gennethenta* [i.e., a participle of the verb *gennad*].

As Burton acknowledges, the verb (in participle form) used in both phrases, "born of woman, born under the Law"—*genomenon ek gunaikos, genomenon hupo nomon*—is not the most natural word to refer to birth. The verb used is "*ginomai*" which has a broader meaning of "to become, to arise, to occur, to come into existence, to be created." It can also be used in the sense of human birth, but that meaning will be determined by the context. On the other hand, there is a verb which in straightforward fashion means "to be born": the passive of "*gennad*," to give birth. The question becomes, why did Paul not use *gennad* if all he meant was that Jesus was born in the normal human way? What would have led him to use *ginomai* instead? First, we need to consider a few statistics.

Burton has already deduced that Paul does not have to mean literally "born" in "born under the Law," although he does not apply the same reasoning to "born of woman" because he thinks the context imposes the ordinary birth meaning. But if Paul envisioned an entirely mythical Christ, did *ginomai* better serve his purpose? If he decided that the two thoughts needed to be expressed—perhaps under the pressure of a scriptural verse, most likely Isaiah 7:14—was *ginomai* the best word available? Was he again putting forward an idea regardless of whether or not it could be rationally understood, simply putting his trust in scripture? Considering what he was able to do with terms like "flesh" and "body" in purely mystical and metaphysical settings, placing a 'birth' by a 'woman' in such a setting would not likely be beyond him. And remember that in Revelation 12, the Messiah could be born to a woman in the heavens.

Furthermore, what do we find when we examine the Pauline usages of the two verbs throughout his letters and compare them with usages in the wider record? (I will in most cases refer to the main verb itself, rather than the specific form in which it appears.) The results are illuminating:

One: Paul (as we have him in the canonical texts) uses *ginomai* in any alleged sense of "born" *only* in regard to Christ: Romans 1:3 and Galatians 4:4. The Philippians hymn uses the same verb in 2:7, "*made* in the likeness of men." All three relate to the issue under discussion: does this use of *ginomai* signify something other than ordinary human birth? If the two verbs are supposedly synonymous to convey the meaning of "born," why does Paul choose this verb *only* in these cases?

Two: Consider other epistolary uses of *ginomai*: 1 Corinthians 15:45: "Adam became [*ginomai*] a living soul." Here it cannot be the meaning "born," since Adam was created by God, not born of anyone. In 1 Corinthians 1:30, Paul speaks of Christ Jesus "who is made [*ginomai*] for us wisdom." Hebrews 1:4 speaks of Christ "becoming [*ginomai*] so much superior to the angels." Of Paul, pseudo-Paul says in Ephesians 3:7 "I became [*ginomai*] a minister of the gospel." There is a certain consistency here. The usage of *ginomai* in this area is directed at "becoming," not being "born." So what should we make of the fact that in relation to Christ, Paul gravitates to *ginomai*?

Three: When Paul *does* want to directly and unmistakably express "born" what does he use? Outside of his two references to Christ, he always uses *gennao*: Romans 9:11 (children not yet born), Galatians 4:23 and 4:29 (the son/one... born...). The latter are in his allegory of the two sons of Abraham, born to two women Sarah and Hagar, coming only a few verses after he has spoken of Christ as "born of woman." Why did he switch verbs here, if they both meant the same thing and he wanted to state the same thing?

Four: In none of the other epistles is the verb *ginomai* used for "born." Not in Hebrews 11:23, not in 1 John 2:29, 3:9, 4:7, 5:1 or 5:18.

Five: In *all* cases (about two dozen) where the Gospels express the idea of being "born" they use either *gennao*, the adjective *gennetos*, or the verb *tikto* (to bear). In no case do they use *ginomai*. When they refer specifically to the

birth of Jesus (four times in Matthew, twice in Luke), they use *gennad*, or *tikto* once in Luke. John uses *ginomai* twice in the Prologue: "all things were made [*egeneto*] through him," where it hardly means "born"; and "the Word was made [*egeneto*] flesh," where it has the same meaning of "made" rather than "born."

If the two verbs can be equally understood as "born" in this type of context, and if the implication is that a writer could have used one or the other since he would have been sensible of no distinction, why does the law of averages not apply in the New Testament? Why is there in the epistles a universal use of *gennad* to apply to all births other than that of Jesus, as well as to Jesus' birth in the Gospels? Why does a distinction only exist between the Gospels' consistent use of *gennao* to refer to Jesus' birth, and Paul's consistent use of *ginomai* to refer to Jesus' (alleged) birth? Was it not the same sort of birth?

The strong implication is that, if the key phrases in Paul are his own voice and not an interpolation, Paul must have had in mind something different in regard to Christ than simply being "born" in the normal sense. If all he meant was the latter, then he should have had no reason to choose *ginomai* in those isolated cases.

Further, when we consider the usage of the entire phrase "born of woman," we see the same imbalance. In the Septuagint the phrase occurs three times in Job and once in Sirach; in the Gospels it occurs twice. Some usages in the later apologists have to do with quoting Matthew and Luke. Every one of these phrases uses *gennao* (or the Latin equivalent). The only exceptions are those which quote Paul's use of *ginomai*. It is often claimed that Paul used the phrase because it was so common. If it was so common, why did he not use it in the common form? The very fact that something is common should lead one to use it if one means the common thing. If it was found in scripture and Paul was taking his cue from there, why did he change the verb that was used in scripture? The fact that Paul changed the key element of the phrase should lead us to conclude that he was avoiding using it in its normal form because he meant something different from the normal understanding.

Or else, he didn't write it at all.

"Born of Woman, Born under the Law" as an Interpolation

While noting factors which might suggest interpolation, we have so far been analyzing this passage while adopting the assumption that "born of woman, born under the Law" could have been written by Paul. If we abandon that assumption, would the problem be solved? Is there evidence and argument available to make the solution of interpolation acceptable and even persuasive?

First, let's see how the passage would read if those phrases were dropped. And in fact, a context does exist in which those phrases do not appear. Not in the form of any extant manuscript of Galatians which does not contain them, yet something pointing to that very thing. The following is a reconstruction of the passage from the version of Galatians used by the gnostic Marcion in the mid 2nd

century. Although a copy of Marcion's document is not extant, scholars have reconstructed most of it from passages in Tertullian's *Against Marcion* in which Tertullian, in great detail, takes Marcion to task for adulterating the "true original" of Paul's letter. From that work, Marcion's version of Galatians 4:3-6 has been put together as follows.⁷⁸

As a man I say,
When we were barely-born,
We were enslaved
Under the elements of the cosmos.
But when the fullness of time came,
God sent forth his Son,
That he might purchase those under law,
And that we may receive adoption.
God sent forth the Spirit of his Son
Into your hearts, crying, "Abba, Father".

In Book V chapter 4, Tertullian is going step by step through the opening verses of Galatians 4. He quotes, "But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son—" then stops and makes a few comments on God's control of time, its ages and days. Then he resumes:

But for what end did He send His Son? 'To redeem them that were under the Law...and that we might receive the adoption of sons,' that is, the gentiles, who once were not sons. [Translations of Tertullian taken from *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. III]

The phrases "born of woman, born under the Law" are passed over without comment—if indeed they were in Marcion's copy of the epistle. (If they were not, it would never have crossed Tertullian's mind to think that the phrases in his own copy, half a century later, might have been added and that Marcion's version was the original.) We can also note that Tertullian has taken "God" as the subject of "to redeem them that were under the Law," something that is easier to do when the 'born' phrases do not intervene.

We know that Tertullian's own copy (in Latin) contained them because he appeals to the phrase "born of woman" in another place (*On the Flesh of Christ*, 20), where he says:

Paul, too, silences these critics when he says, 'God sent forth His Son, made of a woman.' Does he mean *through* a woman, or *in* a woman? [This relates to the conflict between heretical and orthodox interpretations of Christ's nature.] Nay more, for the sake of greater emphasis, he uses the word 'made' [*factum*] rather than 'born' [*natum*], although the use of the latter expression would have been simpler.

The Latin "*factum*" (the verb *facio*) corresponds to the Greek *genomenon* (the verb *ginomai*), while "*natum*" (the verb *nascor*) corresponds to *gennomenon* (the verb *gennaō*). This tells us that Tertullian, even though he understood *factum* to

mean "born," acknowledged that *natum* (and *gennomenori*) would have been the more natural language. He explains Paul's use of *ginomai* by saying he wanted to emphasize "the reality of the flesh which was made of a virgin," but this would have been imputing to Paul an awareness of 2nd century disputes and an intention to discredit them. We do, however, know from this (and from Irenaeus a little earlier) that both Greek and Latin versions of Galatians by the late 2nd century contained *ginomai/facio* in that phrase. We also know (from Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* III, 10,3) that they also contained "born under the law" and that this verb, too, was *ginomai/facio*.

Were the phrases "born of woman, born under the Law" in Marcion's earlier copy or not? It might seem curious either way, that Tertullian did not comment on them if they were present, or did not castigate Marcion for removing them if they were not. (Either way, Tertullian should have brought them up, especially "born under the Law," for it would have been useful to condemn Marcion's position that Jesus was not sent by the Jewish God.) Yet the conundrum is fairly easily solved thanks to Tertullian himself. After addressing verse 3, and before he goes on to verse 4, he says: "But indeed it is superfluous to dwell on what he has erased, when he may be more effectually confuted from that which he has retained." Thus, if "born of woman, born under the Law" was missing in Marcion, Tertullian's silence on that 'erasure' would fit his stated intention not to dwell on such things. Whereas, if the words were present, his silence would go against his stated intention to address the things Marcion retained. Thus, if we can judge Tertullian by his own words, "born of woman, born under the Law" was not present in Marcion's version of Galatians.

But there remains the question: was it the case that Marcion excised the phrases? They could be said to go against Marcion's doctrine that Jesus was not "born" of anyone, but descended from heaven as a fully adult (docetic) man; and since Marcion had even less use for the Jewish Law than Paul did (he rejected all things Jewish as not originally belonging to his conception of Christianity), these two phrases would have been prime candidates for the cutting-room floor. The issue cannot be settled one way or the other. All we can say with a good degree of confidence is that the Galatians used by Marcion which Tertullian was addressing did not contain "born of woman, born under the Law."⁷⁹

Textual Corruptions

But in addition to the observations made earlier, that the analysis of the surrounding text would make "born of woman, born under the Law" irrelevant to it and not likely to have been included by Paul, there is another consideration which works in favor of interpolation. For this, we must go to an influential book by Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* (1993). Ehrman's exhaustive study of the extant texts of the New Testament led him to realize that over the course of the early centuries from which we have a surviving record—beginning after the year 200—numerous amendments and insertions were made by Christian scribes to many passages. As Ehrman says in his Introduction:

My thesis can be stated simply: scribes occasionally altered the words of their sacred texts to make them more patently orthodox and to prevent their misuse by Christians who espoused aberrant views, [p. xi]....[The first chapter] explores the ways proto-orthodox Christians used literature in their early struggles for dominance, as they produced polemical treatises, forged supporting documents under the names of earlier authorities, collected apostolic works into an authoritative canon, and insisted on certain hermeneutical principles for the interpretation of these works....It was within this milieu of controversy that scribes sometimes changed their scriptural texts to make them *say* what they were already known to *mean*. In the technical parlance of textual criticism...these scribes 'corrupted' their texts for theological reasons, [p.xii]

Ehrman creates a picture of orthodox Christians tampering with all sorts of passages, scribal emendations done for the purpose of making it clear that Jesus was such-and-such in opposition to heretical doctrines such as adoptionism, separationism, and especially docetism (the position that Jesus only *seemed* to be an actual man). Although these observations are based on variant manuscript readings coming from the 3rd century and later (since we have no manuscripts earlier than about the year 200), Ehrman was able, by comparison with citations from 2nd and 3rd century commentators like Irenaeus and Origen, to make certain deductions about emendations that could have been made as early as the first half of the 2nd century.⁸⁰

It is certainly the case that if contentions within Christianity could induce scribes to alter and insert words in the later period, there was nothing to prevent them from doing so in the 2nd century. "Born of woman" would be a natural insertion in Galatians (perhaps around the middle of the century, to counter the claims of docetists like Marcion and others and their appropriation of Paul) in order to make the point that Jesus was in fact a fully human man from a human mother. Why Paul, on the other hand, would have needed to make this obvious point is not so clear, especially if he wrote long before docetism came along with views that would need counteracting.

In a section entitled "Christ: Born Human" in his chapter on "Anti-Docetic Corruptions of Scripture," Ehrman points out (p.239) that Galatians 4:4 was indeed a passage that was a favorite for amendment. The Greek "*genomenon ek gunaikos*" was occasionally changed to "*gennomenon ek gunaikos*"—from the verb *ginomai* to *gennao*, the latter being the verb that everyone (including Tertullian) has acknowledged was the plainer word for being born in the human way. Similarly in Latin manuscripts, says Ehrman, "*factum*" (made) was changed to "*natum*" (born). Clearly, such later scribes, faced with gnostic doctrine that Jesus had not been born a real human but only in the semblance of one, and that he had passed through Mary without taking on any of her human substance, felt that the verb *ginomai* was not explicit enough and substituted *gennao*. (*Ginomai* did ultimately survive and became part of the received text.) The tense of the participle was also changed, from aorist to present, the latter making it clear that

the qualities of being 'born' of woman and under the law were characteristics that were attendant on the "God sent his Son" idea of verse 4, rendering the 'sending' as a reference to the incarnation.

If later scribes were amending these important texts, earlier ones could well have introduced the entire phrase in the first place during a period when Jesus was struggling to emerge from mythical to historical, or from docetism to flesh and blood humanity. Later, scribes in some communities felt that the initial insertion was not graphic enough, not 'human' enough, and so changed *ginomai* to *gennad*, *facio* to *nascor*. This, by the way, would indicate that the two verbs were *not* regarded as interchangeable and that *ginomai* was not the strongest verb to convey the idea of being born in the human way.

But, one might ask, if the double phrase was from the start a scribal interpolation to make the case for human birth and human nature in Christ, why did the initial interpolator choose *ginomai* instead of *gennad*? Why not put in the more 'natural' verb from the start? The answer to this has to be somewhat speculative. Perhaps one scribe had a different feeling than another about the relative meaning and form of each verb. Nuances can also change over time. When a later scribe was looking for a way to make the case for human birth stronger, it may have struck him that this would be a change for the better. It has been suggested that using *ginomai* would have been 'more literary' than using *gennao*.

On the other hand, Tertullian himself offers a feasible explanation, as we have seen. Recall the passage in *On the Flesh of Christ*, 20, quoted earlier:

Nay more, for the sake of greater emphasis, he uses the word 'made' [*factum*] rather than 'born' [*natum*], although the use of the latter expression would have been simpler.

Tertullian found not only that *factum/genomenon* sounded fine to his ears, he believed that the reason for it was to create greater emphasis. Perhaps the original interpolator felt the same way. Apparently, later scribes did not agree and decided to change it.

Christ under the Law

As a final consideration on whether Paul was likely to have written "born under the Law," we ought to examine his attitude about what being under the Law meant to him. To his way of thinking, it was entirely a negative condition, useless for salvation, an enabler of sin. God needed to free believers from it. He says in Romans 3:20: "No human being can be justified in the sight of God for having kept the Law: Law brings only the consciousness of sin." It would surely have occurred to him—and to his readers—to wonder how the human Jesus, if he was born under Law, was exempt from this terrible fate. Romans 3:20 and Galatians 4:4 would thus seem to constitute something of a contradiction, one requiring clarification. The very inclusion of "born under the Law" in Galatians 4:4 would imply that Christ was in fact subject to the Law and therefore a prey to all its impediments; the phrase could have served no other purpose than to say

that he was like us in regard to the Law. But if Paul did not mean that, or meant it only in a limited fashion, if he excluded all the negative aspects he was constantly reiterating, he would have had to spell that out. (And what would have been left to actually embody the condition of Christ's being "born under the Law" and what purpose would it have served?) A later scribe inserting it might not have been aware of the discrepancy he was setting up, but Paul surely would have been. He, not the scribe, was the writer of the context.

Romans 7:7 - Is the Law identical with sin? Surely not. Yet I would not have known sin except through the Law. I would not have known lust except for the Law saying: thou shalt not lust.

We can be rather sure that Paul had in mind actual *lust* and not the milder "coveting" which sanitizing translations prefer to use. He alludes to something more graphic in 7:23, but there too a roadmap is not needed to decide what "members" he is talking about. But if being born under the Law had that effect on him, it might be wondered why it did not do the same to Christ.

Romans 7:21 - When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.

Would not evil have been there with Christ, if *he* was born under the Law? If no one will be declared righteous in the sight of God by observing the Law, how can this not have included Jesus? Indeed, did he himself obey the Law or flout it; did he, like Paul, regard the Law as something that was no longer an asset to salvation, something that needed to be set aside? (Not according to Matthew and Luke—from Q—he didn't.) Would Paul not need to elucidate this point? Surely his position would stand or fall on that very question. It is difficult to see how he could have put forward such a revolutionary gospel as the abolition of the ancient Torah without addressing the question of whether Jesus himself had advocated such a thing. If he had, this is all Paul would have needed. If he had not, or if he had preached the retention of the Law (as very clearly in Matthew), Paul would not have had a leg to stand on in anyone's eyes.

If all of this was liable to raise confusion in his readers, it is perplexing that Paul would even be tempted to state Jesus' subjection to the Law in Galatians 4:4, especially since it would have served no practical purpose. The more Paul called attention to Jesus' status under the Law, supposedly to say that he was like us, the more the anomaly would work against him.

In sum, the question of interpolation of these phrases cannot be settled with absolute certainty. But there are enough compelling indicators that Paul either could not or would not have included them in the Galatians 4:4 passage to remove them from contention as good evidence that Paul viewed his Christ as a recent human man. Taken together with the alternative possibility that these phrases, if by Paul, reflect a metaphysical view of Jesus determined by scripture (although I now lean more toward the interpolation option), I regard this as an effective neutering of perhaps the most significant argument on the historicist side that the epistles stand in the tradition of an historical Jesus.

A Sacrifice in Heaven

Jesus the Son

Perhaps the most fascinating and revealing of all documents in the New Testament is the Epistle to the Hebrews. In ancient times, as Christianity was developing its canon of inspired and authoritative writings toward the end of the 2nd century, Hebrews was attributed to Paul. In modern times, such an attribution is recognizable as an indication not only of the unreliability of early Christian traditions, but the lack of sophistication in ancient exegesis. The soteriological picture in Hebrews is in fact quite unlike anything else in the early Christian record and could not possibly be the product of Paul; nor is it easily relatable to any other circle we know of, despite modern attempts to link it with this or that figure known from the record, such as the Alexandrian apostle Apollos.

This theological dissertation (far more than a simple 'letter') tells us several things which support, indeed establish, the mythicist case. The very uniqueness just mentioned illustrates the nature of the early Christ-belief movement: something piecemeal and uncoordinated, with independent pockets of revelation and interpretation of scripture springing up in communities across the eastern empire; they shared in certain basic ideas but underwent their own genesis and evolution, merging into the Christianity we are familiar with only at a later time. The Epistle to the Hebrews also reflects, even more clearly than the indicators in Paul that have been examined, the fact that some early cultic Christians could place the saving activities of their Christ in the heavenly world, in a graphic scenario involving flesh and blood and heavenly places. This spiritual literalism has caused considerable difficulty to some modern scholars who have sought to solve the perceived problem by declaring this aspect of the epistle as intended to be only metaphorical.

Hebrews also reveals an astonishing ignorance of the actual events of crucifixion and resurrection. A focus on the cross of Calvary, as well as any form of resurrection, is almost non-existent, playing no role in the picture of Christ's act of salvation; this belies any idea of the early Christian movement as the proclamation of an historical Jesus' saving death and emergence from the grave. And the epistle's pervasive and exclusive focus on scripture as the source of all knowledge and interpretation of the Son and new High Priest reveals the true genesis of the varied movement which was later to coalesce into a Gospel-based

faith. The epistle also offers us two statements which quite clearly declare that Jesus had never been on earth.

Hebrews has been styled "Alexandrian" because of its elements reminiscent of the Middle Platonic philosophy of that city. But it might be from any number of centers in the eastern Mediterranean exposed to Alexandrian influence, while still allowing for a certain degree of divergence. There are notable differences from the particular approach of Philo, the premier Jewish-Platonic philosopher of Alexandria in the period prior to the Jewish War, which is when the Epistle to the Hebrews needs to be dated (for which see Appendix 4 [p.668]).

Heavenly and Earthly Sanctuaries

Before attempting to clarify Hebrews' unique mix of Platonic and Jewish orientation, we need to understand its basic picture. No other New Testament document so clearly illustrates the higher and lower world thinking of Platonic philosophy. The writer places the sacrifice of Christ in Heaven itself, in "the real sanctuary, the tent pitched by the Lord and not by man" (8:2). Jesus is the new High Priest, and the "tent" of his priesthood—which is compared with the first tent set up for sacrifices in Sinai during the Exodus—"is a greater and more perfect one, not made by men's hands, not part of the created world" (9:11). Christ's "sacrifice" is not spoken of in terms of a crucifixion on Calvary (despite a few references to his death and one to "the cross" with no earthly context attached). The suffering and death he underwent are treated in almost incidental fashion, given no attention in the writer's soteriological scheme of things.

Rather, the "sacrifice" is the act of the new High Priest Jesus who, following his death, brings his own blood into the heavenly sanctuary and there offers it to God as an atonement for sin. This act has "secured an eternal deliverance" (9:12) and established a New Covenant. It is portrayed as a higher-world, more perfect counterpart to the action of the high priest on earth who, on the yearly Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), brings the blood of sacrificed animals into the inner sanctuary of the Temple, offering it to God to obtain forgiveness for the people's sins. Christ's superior heavenly sacrifice, performed 'once for all,' is deemed to have supplanted the earthly ones.

Not only is Christ's sacrifice not identified with Calvary, the writer never introduces into his parallel duality of heavenly High Priest and earthly high priests the idea that an important part of Jesus' act of sacrifice had taken place on earth. This is something which would have seriously compromised the purity of his higher-lower world comparison—indeed made it unworkable. He has said (somewhat indirectly—consider the NEB translation) that the blood of Christ's sacrifice is "unblemished, spiritual and eternal" (9:14), and that this kind of superior sacrifice (to those in the earthly temple) is "required to cleanse heavenly things" (9:23). Yet this "shedding of blood," according to the Gospel picture, had taken place on earth. It was a blood that in Christ's human incarnation was the blood of matter. In that respect it was not spiritual, and the writer would merely be comparing a material thing with another material thing.

The author of Hebrews does nothing to address these anomalies. He shows no sign of being perturbed by any conflict in his theoretical universe. This, one is led to conclude, is because there was no historical Jesus, no sacrifice on Calvary, lurking in the background to disturb his finely drawn duality.

Scholars in older generations have clearly recognized the nature of Hebrews' picture of Christ. "For the complete sacrifice has been offered in the realm of the spirit...in the eternal order of things...it belonged essentially to the higher order of absolute reality." (James Moffatt, *The International Critical Commentary: Hebrews*, p.xlii); Christ's ministry has been "exercised in a more perfect tabernacle and with a truer sacrifice" (Marcus Dods, *The Expositor's Greek Testament: Hebrews*, p.332). Such observations show that it is possible for scholars to recognize that ancient Christians could postulate a spiritual/mythical realm and envision a sacrificial act of Christ within it.

On the other hand, scholars of all generations invariably attempt to introduce an historical Jesus into the equation. Moffatt says (p.xliii): "The writer breathed the Philonic atmosphere [of Middle Platonism] in which the eternal Now overshadowed the things of space and time, but he knew this sacrifice had taken place on the cross, and his problem was one which never confronted Philo, the problem which we moderns have to face in the question: How can a single historical fact possess a timeless significance?" But the writer of Hebrews never gives any indication that he "knew" of such an earthly sacrifice or of "a single historical fact," nor that he faced a problem which Philo did not. Hebrews never asks or addresses Moffatt's question, or other 'problems' like it.

Greek or Jewish?

Classic Platonic dualism sees a prototype, perfect and eternal, in the higher spiritual realm and an imperfect copy, or antitype, in the lower material realm. This element is present in Hebrews in regard to its counterpart heavenly and earthly *sanctuaries*: the heavenly place is the perfect one, made by God, the earthly is modeled on it (through God's original directions to Moses in setting up the tent of the tabernacle in Sinai). The *sacrifices* which are performed in those respective sanctuaries still take place in an essentially Platonic setting, but in a reverse pattern in two ways. The sacrifices in the earthly sanctuary came first, while Jesus' single heavenly sacrifice is treated as coming later, and has been modeled on them—in a sense, as a 'copy.' As well, those first sacrifices on earth are *imperfect*, to be followed by the *perfect* sacrifice of Christ in heaven.

What Gospel-based scholarship has done for centuries is forcibly reconfigure the sacrificial sequence in the direction of a Jewish understanding. Because they envision Jesus' sacrifice as taking place on earth, with Hebrews' presentation of it in Heaven understood as a metaphor for it, or at least as a mystical heavenly invention inspired by an earthly event, it is declared to conform to the Jewish horizontal scheme of a prefiguring in history (the Sinai tent sacrifices) followed by a later event in history (the sacrificial death of Jesus on Calvary). Moreover, traditional Jewish linearity was always in terms of prophecy and prefiguration in

scripture fulfilled in the present: the "then" and the "now"—or the "soon to be" of apocalyptic thought and the expectation of God's kingdom and his imminent intervention in history; this is seen as being Hebrews' pattern. In addition, such an earth-to-earth temporal progression usually involved the 'inferior' proceeding to the 'superior,' in that the fulfillment in the present or future would be greater than the prefiguring in the past, just as Hebrews presents things between the old and the new sacrifices. On these bases, scholarship has thought to maintain that Hebrews is essentially not Platonic, but Jewish.⁸¹

In actuality, however, the progression is not an historical sequence but an earth-to-heaven one. The inferior prototype (the temple sacrifice of animals) takes place on earth, while the superior antitype (Christ's own sacrifice) takes place in Heaven. In Hebrews there is nothing historical or earthly about the latter sacrifice, nor does it include or envision a prior earthly dimension. To see a suffering and death *on an earthly Calvary* as lying behind the sacrifice in heaven (assuming some scholarly acknowledgement of an actual heavenly sacrifice, as opposed to declaring it a metaphor for the supposed earthly event), is nowhere justified by the text itself, and is even ruled out by many things the text says or does not say. It can be derived only by imposing Gospel preconceptions on the epistle. (We will see where the 'suffering and death' phase should be placed.)

To sum up, the central concern of the epistle is the comparison between what happened (and still happens) on earth in the sacrifices performed by the Jewish high priest in the earthly sanctuary, and what happened in Heaven in Jesus the High Priest's own sacrifice in the heavenly sanctuary. An earthly event is set opposite a heavenly event, a material act opposite a spiritual act. The reason for the focus on the first tent-sanctuary set up by Moses at Sinai is because this represents the establishment of the Old Covenant, against which is set Jesus' own sacrifice in Heaven as the establishment of the New Covenant and the supplanting of the Old. The Old Covenant began in the desert of the Exodus. The New Covenant began with Jesus' sacrifice in Heaven where his blood was offered in the heavenly sanctuary. It is never stated as beginning with his death, let alone on earth or at Calvary. And while there is a certain sense that the sacrifice of Christ 'follows' the initial Sinai sacrifices, there is no actual assigning of that sacrifice to a specific point in history.

The Old and the New

There is another, exceedingly important progression in this epistle, one that cannot be recognized until one sets aside the preconceptions induced by the Gospels. The "then" and "now" of the old Temple sacrifices and the new sacrifice of Jesus are a sequence, but what have they been derived from? The standard answer is: the first from scripture, the second from recent history. In fact, both are derived from scripture. In the opening verses of the epistle, the writer lays out the old and the new in this way:

'in many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets;
²but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son,

whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. [RSV]

But how has this new voice of the Son "spoken"? There is not a single quote of a saying or teaching of the Gospel Jesus throughout the epistle's thirteen chapters; there is not a single word which could be assigned to a man in history. Instead, several scriptural passages, appearing in the first person in the biblical texts, are offered as the voice of the Son now to be heard in these last days, a voice speaking *out of scripture*. Further, there is not a single earthly deed of the Son offered (anything so interpreted by scholars is not stated as such in the text but simply assumed to be), while those that are derived from scripture are presented with no qualification that they represent historical fulfillments of scriptural precedent. What we actually have is scriptural precedent fulfilled *in scripture*, which is to say, the *new interpretation* of scripture.

This new scriptural reading has provided a hitherto unknown picture of the Son's operations in the heavenly realm. (Compare this with the Pauline corpus' focus on the long-hidden secret of Christ now revealed through scripture and the Holy Spirit.) In other words, the *revelation* of the activities (and words) of Jesus and the new-covenant role he has played in the supernatural world to bring about the present fulfillment of salvation history is itself the "now" side of the equation. (Translating that into a Gospel-derived 'history' is a reading into the text.) The newly-perceived voice of the Son in scripture, prompted by the Holy Spirit as Paul so often says, is the new communication from God "in these last days." This new, inspired reading of scripture has been set against the voice of the prophets and the past understanding of scripture, which was the "old." Such is the "past" and "present" meaning behind the opening verses, borne out through the entire epistle. It is the "earlier and later" which modern scholarship on Hebrews insists on interpreting as the adumbration of the Son followed by his incarnation to earth, in keeping with traditional Jewish linear orientation.

It has been contended that the opening verses set up a comparison between the 'flesh and blood' prophets of old, and the 'flesh and blood' Jesus of the present. The prophets "spoke to our forefathers." But how? The writer hardly has in mind simply those who heard the prophets in person preaching in their own time. Rather, he is referring to the voice of the prophets *in the written words of scripture*, which all the generations since those words were written down have read. Most of those "forefathers" would have heard the voice of God *through the prophets in scripture*. It would follow that the later hearing of God is envisioned in the same way: the voice of the Son as recorded in the same medium, only newly interpreted through a Holy Spirit-inspired revelation in the present. This fits so many instances in this and other epistles, both canonical and otherwise (e.g., 1 Clement 16:15), in which the voice of the Son is offered in terms of passages in scripture taken to be 'spoken' by him.

And it goes without saying that if the writer refers to the voice of the Son in the sacred writings as the means by which God speaks in the present age, then he knows of no Jesus of Nazareth speaking for God with a human voice on earth.

A Time of Revelation

There is another close similarity to the Pauline type of expression examined in the previous chapter. It involves the question: what is the 'time' of Christ's sacrifice which has established the New Covenant; or to approach it another way, what is it that has taken place in the author's time? In 9:10, the author specifies that the *moment* (as opposed to the *means*) at which the Old Covenant has been supplanted by the New is not the time of the sacrifice itself, not the time of Jesus' life, but the "time of reformation" in his own day. In other words, the time at which the Old is replaced by the New is the time of *revelation*, of understanding. It is the point at which the new interpretation of scripture, as reflected by the writer, has formulated the picture of Christ the Son and his sacrificial activity in the heavenly world.

As 9:8-9 shows, the new sanctuary and Christ's sacrifice within it are things "revealed" (although the concept of the heavenly sanctuary itself was not original to the author or community of Hebrews). The writer notes that the Sinai tent-sanctuary contained inner and outer parts (as the temple in his day still do), with access to the inner room restricted to the High Priest, and only once a year (9:7). This symbolizes that access to God under the Old Covenant was limited. The writer also interprets the structure of the tent, with entry to the inner tent hidden by the outer tent that stood before (or around) it, to be a symbol that the heavenly sanctuary and the sacrifice of Christ within it had been "undisclosed" throughout Jewish history until now. That dual tent structure with its "hidden" inner tent, he says, was a deliberate "symbol" created by the Holy Spirit. It was directed at scriptural interpreters like himself who would one day understand that the better and ultimate way into God's presence was, throughout that history, yet to come. This way to the new sanctuary, the establishment of the New Covenant, was "not yet revealed," (*mepo pephanoerosthai* [9:8]), as long as the outer tent-sanctuary and the Old Covenant remained in place.

Now, however, it *has* been revealed (even though the temple cult is still functioning, though its demise is expected shortly [8:13]). The New Covenant is taking effect, while the Old is fading fast. But note how this is presented. The Holy Spirit has created "a symbol pointing to the present time" (9:9). But what specifically was it pointing *to*? As noted, what has happened in the "now" to bring this about is *disclosure*, the event of revealing (our constant epistolary friend, the verb *phaneroo*). It is not the act of Jesus that the Holy Spirit pointed to, which has occurred in the present to bring about the new order; rather, it is the revelation of that act through the new interpretation of scripture, including the Son's own perceived voice within it. (This sequence is precisely what was found in Romans 1:2, that God's gospel of the Son in scripture 'pre-announced' not Jesus but Paul's gospel about him.)

God's abolition of the Old Covenant was *by means of* Jesus' act, but the abolition's application is through the *revelation* of the act. As the writer presents it, the coming into effect of the New Covenant occurs at the time of such discovery and the spread of that knowledge—the "time of reformation" (9:10)—

which is what the writer and his community regard themselves as being a part of. It has not come into effect at the time of Jesus' act itself, nor is the reformation *itself* something performed by Jesus.

Just as Paul in Galatians 3 and 4 sees God's purchasing of freedom from the Law as something taking place at the time of faith in his own present and not at the time of Jesus' act, the writer of Hebrews similarly sees the Holy Spirit as having pointed not to Jesus but to the time of reformation, the time of knowledge *about* Jesus and his heavenly actions which is in the process of reforming (i.e., abolishing) the old temple sacrifices. Thus scripture is not fulfilled in history. It has been fulfilled in Heaven, as newly interpreted/revealed out of scripture. As presented above, the "earlier" and the "later" lie both within the pages of scripture. The claim of Jewish linearity in terms of a scriptural past leading to an historical present or future is not to be discovered in Hebrews.

The coming into effect of the New Covenant is incomplete. R. McL. Wilson, in discussing 9:8 (*The New Century Bible Commentary: Hebrews*, p.146-147), inadvertently makes a telling observation when he says:

The new [order, covenant] has not yet fully come, but it has been inaugurated, for Jesus has already entered into the inner shrine behind the curtain as a forerunner on our behalf (referring to 6:19-20).

The "new order" is not fully established because the old covenant cult is still being practiced, and there is as yet no universal recognition of the new reality in the Son which this community, and perhaps others, have had revealed to them. But Wilson's observation highlights that once again we are given no specific historical event, no pivot point positioned within history, to absorb any of the focus for the writer's view of the time of change and reformation. Wilson's reference to 6:19-20 is quite telling, for there the author's point at which the New Covenant "has been inaugurated" by Jesus *is not located in history*, let alone on Calvary. It is located *in Heaven*, here without reference to a preceding phase on earth, not even to Jesus' death. The knowledge of that inauguration in Heaven—the act of Jesus entering the inner shrine—can only be through revelation and scripture, and that revelation has taken place in the writer's own time. As with Paul, we can seriously question whether any Christian holding to the Gospel tradition could have placed the focus of the New Covenant's establishment entirely on a mythological act in Heaven derived from scripture and ignore the historical event on Calvary along with Christ's entire life.¹⁹

Another Voice, Another Day

In two further passages we encounter a similar focus on the present to the exclusion of a recent Jesus. In 3:5, the writer says,

Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, to bear witness to the things that would be said in the future. [NIV]

Moses is said to testify about what would be said in the future. But he is being co-opted as a prophet about the writer's own day. That voice in the future is not

the voice of Jesus recently on earth, but a *present* one; for the author goes on to appeal to what "the Holy Spirit says" about that voice, quoting Psalm 95:7-11:

Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in that time of rebellion in the desert...

The readers are being urged not to fall away from God as the Jews in Sinai had done, but to be faithful *in response to his voice*. This is a voice heard "today," in the writer's own time, God's voice consistently taken out of scripture, sometimes heard as that of the Son himself (referred to in 1:2). In other words, Moses has not foretold a preaching Jesus in the writer's recent past, but the voice of God, speaking through the Son "today," as newly interpreted from the sacred writings.

In the same way, 4:7-8 sets up a present-day focus:

(God) again sets a certain day, today, by saying through David [i.e., in the Psalms], as I said: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."

For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have continued to speak of another day.

And what is that "other day" God has spoken of through scripture? It is "today," meaning the present day of the author's community, when response to the gospel preached to them has given its hearers a chance to enter into the "rest" which the Israelites in the desert did not attain. There is no pointing to the "day" of Jesus' life and saving acts, let alone of his own preaching. Here we have the same "then" and "now" encountered throughout all the epistles: a scriptural precedent or promise by God being followed by a present-day fulfillment in the time of the writers, a fulfillment in terms of a new reading of scripture. No role is given to Jesus in the interim, no mention of the incarnation. Thus, even God himself has failed to forecast Jesus' life and teaching (just as his Gospel of the Son failed to do in Romans 1:2), but has looked ahead merely to the gospel revealed to communities like those of Hebrews and Paul, the gospel he has imbedded in scripture. God, too, has presented us with the same void, the same missing figure between the old and the new.

The Cosmic Son

In the opening verses of Hebrews (1:1-4), the description of the Son contains nothing about an incarnated life on earth. Instead, we are given mythological features of the *heavenly* Son, parts of his spiritual identity and role. The features of the Son—he being the image of God's glory and sustainer of the universe—are a direct reflection of Greek Logos philosophy acting upon Jewish personified Wisdom tradition. In verse 4, the writer speaks of the Son bringing about "purification for sins," and this will be laid out in the epistle in terms of the sacrifice performed in the heavenly sanctuary. Nothing of an earthly nature or background is detectable within these opening verses.

In the rest of chapter 1, the writer seeks to demonstrate that the Son, who is the agent of the New Covenant, is superior to the angels, who were the agents of the Old Covenant (it being an extra-biblical tradition that the old one had been

delivered to Moses through angels). And what is the proof of this superiority? A succession of passages from scripture, taken as referring to the Son. There is no mention of any measure of superiority by virtue of his incarnation, his role on earth, his resurrection from the dead. It was suggested earlier that the heavenly Christ, in some circles, might have evolved from a Jewish angelology about priestly and messianic angels. For the community of Hebrews, the heavenly Christ may have been an angelic figure to being with, but of a superior nature, an emanation of God himself. Scripture was drawn on to demonstrate this special distinction, this unique sonship, one which was to develop into the idea of a sacrificial High Priest in Heaven as an atoning figure.

In quoting the 'prooftexts' of the Son's superiority, the author has said (v.6):

...when God brings [or, presents] his firstborn to the world, he says: "Let all God's angels worship him."

The word for "world" here is *oikoumene*. In normal usage, this word is defined as "the inhabited earth." But it seems that Hebrews' 'inhabited earth' is populated only by angels, and since the word occurs in the midst of a passage which is entirely devoted to depictions of Christ in Heaven, we are entitled to take *oikoumene* as having, as Bauer's lexicon calls it, "an extraordinary use," one encompassing the heavenly realm as well. As for what is meant by God 'bringing' or 'presenting,' scholars are unsure. Most are led to take it as God's supposed words at the incarnation, although the original passage from which the quote itself is taken is Deuteronomy 32:43, in which the "him" referred to God. But we need to note that in this introduction to the world, the scriptural quote is something that God "says," not "said." This would make the event something treated as timeless, ever-present because embodied in scripture.

When we look at 10:5-7, we find the same situation, this time with Christ regarded as speaking about himself from scripture (Psalm 40:5-8 in the LXX):

⁵That is why, at his coming into the world, he says:

"Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire,

But thou hast prepared a body for me.

⁶Whole-offerings and sin-offerings thou didst not delight in.

⁷Then I said: 'Here am I: as it is written of me in the scroll,
I have come, O God, to do thy will'."

The writer presents the Son as speaking in scripture, in the present ("he says"). Yet this speaking is "at his coming into the world," which must also be in the same present sense. Again, as in 1:6, we have a timeless or ever-present mythological scene embodied in scripture.⁸³ This "coming" should be taken as no more a reference to the incarnation than was the presenting of the Son to the world in 1:6. These actions are placed not in history, but in whatever world is regarded by the writer as represented by the words of the Psalm—namely, in the spiritual realm. Nor does he show any sense of confusion between this "coming" and any recent coming of Jesus into the world in an historical sense, at Bethlehem or on earth generally. The latter receives no mention.

Scholars again differ on what they think is meant by this, and by the 'coming into the world' (here, 'world' is "*kosmos*" since this is what appears in the LXX passage). Paul Ellingworth (*New International Greek Testament Commentary: Hebrews*, p.499-500) assumes the writer hears Christ speaking through scripture prior to his human incarnation. But he points to a promising interpretation of the "he says," calling it "a timeless present referring to the permanent record of scripture." This is a Platonic idea, with its concept of a higher world of timeless reality. In accordance with this, one should consider that the writer sees scripture as presenting a picture of spiritual world realities, and it is in this spiritual world that Christ operates. The "he says" becomes a mythical present, reflecting the higher world of myth, which seems to be the common universe in which so many early writers place their Christ.

The "body" spoken of in the Psalm, taken messianically, has helped to trigger the idea that Christ assumed a "body" in that spiritual world and there underwent death and performed the heavenly sacrifice that would replace the old sacrificial cult. It is within the supernatural world revealed by scripture that Jesus "has come to do (God's) will." Following the Psalm quote, the writer speaks of "the offering of the body of Jesus Christ" without any glance at an earthly setting.

A Salvation Revealed

At the start of chapter 2, the writer presents an account of how his sectarian group began, through an event of revelation. We can envision this sort of thing happening all over the landscape of early Christ belief throughout the eastern Mediterranean in the 1st century CE, impelled by the fevered spirit of the times, with its apocalyptic fantasies and obsession with salvation. Little independent groups, each anticipating a communication from God while perusing the sacred writings, imagined that these things were forthcoming. The first four verses of chapter 2 are consistently forced into a reference to a "beginning" in the preaching of an earthly Jesus, but a less preconceived reading shows otherwise:

'Therefore, we must pay close attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away.² For if the message spoken through angels was binding...

³how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which was proclaimed [received] at first [lit., a beginning] through the Lord, and confirmed to us by those who heard,

⁴God also bearing witness, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit...

Certain people received the first revelation, and then, probably in forming a group and winning converts during whatever length of time has passed since then (perhaps a generation?), the revelation was "confirmed" to them by those who had received it. There is no sense of apostolic tradition here, a chain of teachings over time through intervening figures from outside the community, let alone ones who had been followers of a Jesus on earth. Translations often insert the pronoun "him" at the end of verse 3 (it is not in the Greek) to strengthen the sense of it being the preaching Jesus whom the initial hearers had heard. But in

fact the "hearing" and "confirming" refer back to the word "salvation," implying the *message* of salvation. This was the revelation that was "received," while "spoken through the Lord" refers to the channel of revelation. (There is a strong similarity in the event of revelation described in the 'prologue' to 1 John.)

Verse 4 tells of God confirming the original revelation by signs and miracles. The ambiguity of the text makes it uncertain whether such signs came at the time of revelation, the time of its passing on (if the two are distinct), or as a reinforcement of the message as time went by. But those who wish to see verse 3 as a reference to Jesus' ministry should be left wondering why such signs from God would be appealed to as validating the message of salvation, while the writer ignores Jesus' own miracles which according to the Gospels served the very purpose of validating his preaching message.

Ellingworth (p. 139) makes the point that "through angels" and "through the Lord" represent God doing the announcing, through old and new intermediaries. This parallels the thought at the opening of the epistle that, in contrast to the prophets of old, "in this final age (God) has spoken to us through the Son." But as we have noted, Hebrews offers no voice of the Son on earth; he is heard through scripture. The reference to "hearing" in 2:3 should be taken in the same sense: "through the Lord" refers to the Son as a spiritual channel, speaking out of scripture, or regarded as God's intermediary emanation in Logos fashion.

Moreover, considering that verse 2 represents the Law and the Old Covenant as "spoken through angels," it would be consistent to see the delivery of the revelation about the New Covenant "spoken through the Lord" as a reference to another spirit-figure channel. Remember, too, that the first chapter's comparison between the angels and the Son was presented entirely within the spiritual realm of scripture, with no reference to an earthly dimension for the Son. Viewing the medium of angels and the medium of the spiritual Son in chapter 2 as confined to scripture and Heaven would thus, once again, be consistent.

The claim that the message was something delivered by a Jesus on earth is also incompatible with later references to the message "heard" at the beginning. The writer in 5:12 is chiding his readers for not advancing swiftly enough from absorbing the basics of the message to mastering more advanced truths. How does he describe those basics? They are "the rudiments of the beginning of the oracles of God," with the "beginning" being (as in 2:3) a reference to what was "received at first"—namely, the initial message of salvation. But if in 2:3 that message was allegedly the preaching and words of Jesus of Nazareth, why in 5:12 does it become "the oracles of God," which is a reference to scripture and revelation? To avoid a contradiction, the earlier 2:3 must be understood in the same way, a reception from God, God's own word.

Similarly, in 6:4-5, the writer says,

⁴It is impossible for those who have been enlightened and have tasted the heavenly gift and are sharers in the Holy Spirit,

⁵who have tasted the good word of God and the powerful things of the age to come...

Here it is spelled out that the elements of the message heard/received at the beginning was *not* the teaching of Jesus, but a heavenly gift bestowed ("tasted") through the Holy Spirit, and constituted the word of God. (This will be made even clearer by a passage to be looked at in chapter 12.) This is a total focus on God's word and the gift from Heaven, with nothing left to be assigned to Jesus. It is impossible to imagine why a writer would present to his community such an account of the beginnings and inspiration of the sect if in fact those things lay in the life, teachings and death of a human Jesus only a generation or so earlier.

A Descending and Ascending Son

In chapter 2, we encounter the passage most appealed to in this document in support of an historical Jesus. It begins with a quotation from Psalm 8:4-6:

- ⁶What is man that you are mindful of him,
 the son of man that you have regard for him?
⁷You made him for a little while lower than the angels;
 You crowned him with glory and honor;
⁸You put all things in subjection beneath his feet.

Here "the son of man" in the second line (and probably the "man" of the first line with it) has been interpreted by the writer as a reference to the Son, not simply to humanity, as the Psalmist intended. After admitting that the Son does not yet have all things in subjection to him, he suggests a different application of the final verse:

- ⁹But we see Jesus, who for a short while was made lower than the angels,
 now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the
 grace of God he might taste death on behalf of everyone.

Suffering death on humanity's behalf is another expression of the paradigmatic parallel of experiences: Jesus the Son suffered and died as we do, which establishes the linkage between deity and humanity; this will be carried over on the positive side in that, because he was crowned with glory and honor as a result of that suffering and death, we too "as sons shall be brought to glory" (v. 10). This paradigm principle is found throughout early Christian soteriology. Paul's "baptism into Christ" and other concepts of linkage between Christ and the believer is an expression of the widespread idea of joining one's fate with a savior god through faith and ritual.

But where did the Son suffer and die? We need to note the very close correspondence here with the hymn in Philippians 2:6-11. There, the as-yet unnamed entity who shared God's nature descended to take on the likeness of men (no mention is made of a life on earth). Here in Hebrews, the Son descends "lower than the angels" (no mention of a life on earth here either), a position which would be achieved once he reached the lowest heavens. In both passages the descending god suffers death, as a consequence of which he is exalted to glory and is given power over all things and all forces in the universe. The same motif is found in Romans 1:4 where the Son after his resurrection to Heaven is

declared Son of God "in power," reflecting Psalm 2:7 which has inspired it. So too the hymn of 1 Timothy 3:16, in which a divine being, after his sojourn in the realm of flesh was "glorified in high heaven." Such a scenario is spelled out in detail in the pre-Gospel stage of the Ascension of Isaiah.

In 4:14, as a concluding exhortation to hold fast to faith, the author adds this justification: "Since we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold to our confession." If this is taken as a reference to Jesus' ascension after his time on earth (as is usually the case), it would serve little or no purpose. The ascension, as conceived by orthodoxy, had no role in salvation, and why it would be a reason for holding fast to faith is obscure. Besides, in detailing what Jesus did, why mention the heavens but not earth itself? The answer is likely that the act of salvation directly involved this passing through the heavens. This would fit the concept of the descent and ascent of the Son, first descending to the lowest sphere to undergo death, then ascending to the heavenly sanctuary to offer his blood in a new atonement sacrifice.

This is the fundamental myth of early cultic Christianity: the 'mystery' of a descending Son (one never placed on earth or identified with an historical figure) who undergoes death and is exalted back to heaven to receive his destined power. Many communities of belief seem to have tapped into this mythical scenario—one which went back as much as a millennium in more primitive forms throughout the Near East—and each one handled it in its own way. The community of Hebrews adopted a unique (as far as we know) version in envisioning the Son as performing an atonement sacrifice in a heavenly sanctuary, though this too followed the paradigmatic principle of counterpart activity between earth and heaven. In view of these threads and roots extending throughout the mythology of the ancient world and its history, it would be naive to maintain that for all those early cultic Christ circles this was their 'reading' of an historical man, one who is never mentioned and whose interpretation along these lines is never defended for the unprecedented and outlandish application it would have constituted.

Being Jesus' "brothers"

An essential element to this descent of the Son was the taking on of a "likeness" to those of the lower world, and Hebrews' own conception of the matter is no exception. The writer first stresses (2:11-13) the idea that Jesus regards those he is "sanctifying" as his "brothers." To demonstrate this, he appeals to passages from the Psalms and Isaiah in which the Son is envisioned as speaking; such as:

I will declare your name to my brothers... [Psalm 22:22]

This linkage with Jesus as "brothers" solidifies the paradigmatic link between them. And yet this is a curious way to demonstrate such a link, appealing to scripture to establish the commonality, since if Jesus had been incarnated to earth in a human body and he is being linked to them in that way, the point was

automatic. It is also a commonality that exists in the present, as once again we have scripture being quoted as the voice of the Son speaking now ("he says"), while no word is offered about the commonality that existed in the past when Jesus was on earth. Scholars have also been led to wonder why the writer could not have appealed to words of Jesus in his ministry, perhaps like those which found their way into the Gospels, such as Mark 3:35, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother."⁸⁴

Curious, too, is the quotation in 2:13b from Isaiah 8:18:

Behold, I and the children whom God has given me.

Believers are Christ's "children," an idea more in keeping with a relationship to a heavenly being (as in Paul's 'we have been made sons of God' in Galatians 4), than in the context of a fellow human being on earth. Again, the thought lies in the present, with a "he says" in scripture.

Having established that believers are "brothers" and "children" to Christ, the writer adds to this the paradigmatic parallel in the act of redemption itself, by the common and explicit appeal to "likeness." Just as the children have blood and flesh, "in like manner" (*paraplesios*, which we earlier noted does not mean identical to but only resembling, near to) did Christ partake of the same things. Incidentally, one must be wary of translations which read incarnation into the words, using terms such as "humanity" and "human nature." The Greek says simply "he shared the same things," i.e., "blood and flesh."

Now, it is again curious that the writer would make this specific reference to blood and flesh, rather than a general comment such as that he had a human body like ourselves, or lived a life like our own. But these are the two elements which a Son descending to the lower heavens could take on—in a spiritual equivalent. The writer, then, has limited himself to making those, and only those, the points of commonality.

Moreover, in verse 17 it is stated that Jesus has taken on this commonality

in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.

Such a purpose relates entirely to things that are or can be located in the heavens, acts relating to the suffering and death, and the offering of his blood in the heavenly sanctuary as an atonement sacrifice. If the commonality with humans involved incarnation and a teaching and prophetic ministry on earth, much more would have been encompassed within that purpose of taking on blood and flesh. The final verse (2:18) speaks of the Son being "tempted," but this is specifically related to the event of his suffering, and thus can be seen as a temptation to avoid the death experience (in the heavens), a temptation he overcame. This, too, is presented as a paradigmatic parallel to those tempted on earth.⁸⁵

At every turn, we not only encounter a persistent void on elements relating to an earthly incarnation, we find an internal consistency of expression which perfectly fits the mythicist and cosmic Son interpretation, something that is true of the epistolary record as a whole.

In the Days of his Flesh

In chapter 13, this verse (5:7) was analyzed in terms of possible applications of the word "flesh" to heavenly settings. Here we can note that, once again, elements relating to an earthly incarnation are missing. For what is it that Christ did in those "days of his flesh"? The context of this passage is a continuation of the theme of obedience, which is being urged on the readers, that they not abandon the faith in the face of adversity. The actions of Jesus are thus related to his testing and passing that test of obedience:

(Christ) offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the One able to deliver him out of death, and he was heard because of his piety.

Even the Son of God felt apprehension and prayed for deliverance, and because of his faith in God was indeed delivered—that is, he was resurrected, not spared his suffering and death. This example the writer wishes his readers to follow (not that they *must* suffer death, only that they be willing to face it), so that they too will be delivered and enter upon God's "rest." But from what source has the writer drawn these examples of Christ's behavior? For something so important, to impress upon his readers the image of Christ apprehensive but obedient in the face of martyrdom, where does he go? Amazingly, not to history, but to scripture. "Offering up prayers and supplications" is drawn from Psalm 116:1, which uses the same words (in the LXX version), while "loud cries and tears" is an enlargement on Psalm 22:24, "when I cried to him, he heard me" (again in the LXX wording).

Indeed, it is almost unthinkable that the author in this situation would not have appealed to some tradition attached to the historical Jesus, his behavior under duress at his trial and scourging, his willing sacrifice on the cross of Calvary. Now, it is certainly the case that the passage suggests the Gospel scene in the Garden of Gethsemane, and probably most modern readers will take it that way. But scholars have recognized the problems in such an interpretation. Here in Hebrews, Jesus is not pleading that he be spared his upcoming ordeal. In Gethsemane, on the other hand, Jesus of Nazareth is portrayed as experiencing fear and apprehension at the prospect of what he is facing, but his plea that he might be spared the cup of suffering he must drink was not heeded by God. This is something that would have contradicted one of the points the writer of Hebrews wishes to make, which is that God answers the prayers of the heavenly High Priest (one of his tasks being, like the earthly high priest, to petition God on the people's behalf). On the other hand, if he was pleading for a conquest of death, then that prayer was indeed answered.

Scholars who squarely face this discrepancy usually downplay any link to Gethsemane. Ellingworth (*op.cit.*, p.285) allows that it does not refer to Gethsemane, though he considers that it must refer to *some* historical event. He notes that 5:7 represents "a generalized use of the language and pattern of Old Testament intercession." Dependence on Gethsemane is also dubious since the Gospel scene is almost certainly Mark's literary invention, and the writer of

Hebrews shows no sign of being familiar with any written Gospel. The chances of such a scene forming in oral tradition are next to impossible, since it involves words and actions ascribed to Jesus which were not heard or witnessed by anyone. Moreover, the feature of the sleeping disciples would surely have appealed to the writer of Hebrews, perhaps to represent those members of the community who were in danger of falling asleep and missing the true rest which God was promising.

Harold Attridge (*op.cit.*, p. 149) regards "the days of his flesh" as referring to the incarnation, but interprets "flesh" as "cannot[ing] the sphere of weakness and suffering to which Christ was subject." On that principle, if weakness and suffering (as well as death) were experiences possible to divine beings in the lowest celestial sphere (usually below the moon, where corruptibility began), this being the domain of the demon spirits who were also included in "the realm of flesh," then Attridge has given us tacit permission to locate the "days of his flesh," including his crucifixion, in the spiritual world above the earth.

— ii —

Jesus the High Priest

Once Jesus has been turned into a heavenly High Priest, the question of his lineage arises. Derived from scripture, he must operate within Jewish parameters, but at the same time conform to the principle of paradigmatic parallelism. With the old covenantal system replaced by the new, the new High Priest must conform to a pattern of newness. This principle the writer states in 7:12:

For when the priesthood is changed there must also take place a change of Law.

This is a community which sees the old sacrificial cult and Mosaic Law code as having failed on both a national and societal level. A vast innovative change was needed. Sectarian groups like the community of Hebrews were led to see this as being brought about through new plans by God, now revealed to them in various ways. Often the new alternative being offered was directed at the personal level, an opportunity for an elect to gain its own salvation, although the theoretical possibility that society as a whole could be won over was not to be ruled out. If it could be seen that God no longer wanted animal sacrifices, the Temple cult would pass away and a new religious order come into being along the sect's lines of thought. Thus it is not unlikely that the impulse to create something new, a new solution and a new hope, was what led imaginative thinkers and prophets to apply their abilities to a different reading of scripture as a new, updated revelation and plan of action from God.

The earthly high priests are of a certain tribe—historically, the Levites; and they are derived from the figure of Aaron. Jesus the heavenly High Priest must also be linked to a certain tribe and a founding figure, but both different from the old. Melchizedek serves this purpose.

In the Order of Melchizedek

Two passages in the Hebrew bible refer to Melchizedek. The 'historical' one is Genesis 14:18-20. On Abraham's return from victory in the field against local kings, he was met by Melchizedek, "king of Salem" (probably Jerusalem), who brought him "food and wine." Melchizedek "was priest of God Most High" and he pronounced a blessing upon Abraham. In return, Abraham gave Melchizedek "a tithe of all the booty" he had gained from his victory on the battlefield.

These are three short verses, but out of them much has been drawn. Melchizedek was traditionally seen as part of a pre-Abrahamic (thus Canaanite) dynasty of priest-kings, a line that continued through David when he conquered Jerusalem, and thus Melchizedek's line became associated with the tribe of Judah. Prior to chapter 7, the writer of Hebrews three times (5:6, 10 and 20) identifies Jesus as High Priest "in the succession of Melchizedek," and he was such a priest "forever" (5:6 and 20). The latter concept has been derived from Psalm 110, originally addressed to a Hebrew king of the Davidic line, in which verse 4 says:

The Lord has sworn and will not change his purpose:

"You are a priest forever in the succession of Melchizedek."

Jewish thought took this as a reference to the coming Messiah who would reign forever, but the writer of Hebrews has refined this to refer to Jesus as Son and High Priest in Heaven who would serve as a priest forever. The scriptural Melchizedek has provided this new High Priest with a tribe—that of Judah—and a figure who has established a priestly line distinct from that of Aaron, one from whom Jesus can be derived.

And so Hebrews 7:14 says:

For it is evident that our Lord has arisen out of Judah...

While Melchizedek in the Hebrew bible is essentially an historical earthly figure, he was not so by the turn of the era. In the 11QMelch scroll from Qumran, he had come to be regarded as a messianic and possibly angelic figure. Attridge notes (*op.cit.*, p.52) that "Other Jewish speculation on angels and particularly on the figures of Michael and Melchizedek attributes to them a priestly function in the heavenly sanctuary." He further notes (p. 193) the status of Melchizedek as a heavenly being in 2 Enoch, probably to be dated a little before Christianity. Thus, Melchizedek could serve as an ideal forerunner of a priestly line *locatable in Heaven*, with which the new heavenly High Priest Jesus could be associated. Psalm 110:4 could now be read in a heavenly setting, God speaking to the Son and designating him as High Priest in the heavenly Melchizedek's order.⁸⁶

As for being of the "tribe of Judah" in some heavenly fashion, it is not necessary to repeat past observations about relationships between heavenly and earthly figures/groups that are interpreted in mystical fashion; such linkages are regularly made. Nor need we postulate heavenly tribes of Judah walking about

the streets of heaven—although even that thought might be encompassed by 12:23 in which "firstborn citizens of heaven" are assembled alongside the angels in the vision of the heavenly Jerusalem. And within the Jewish concept of heavenly prototypes and prefiguring elements there may well have been room for some kind of heavenly prefiguring of the twelve tribes of Israel. Besides, if a Melchizedek in Heaven could be identified with the tribe of Judah, there seems little reason to deny that convenience to the High Priest Jesus.

It has been observed that, while the writer of Hebrews associates Jesus with the tribe of Judah, he never says anything about him being descended from David (there is no mention whatever of David in connection with Jesus in this document). It has not been so readily observed, however, that the writer in fact *denies* the relevance to Christ's priesthood of any principle of earthly physical descent. Following on 7:14, he says:

And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek arises, *not according to a law about physical requirement*, but to the power of an indestructible life...

Thus while the writer has declared it "evident" that the Lord was of the tribe of Judah, he is not insisting on a physical, historical descent from the Judaic tribe (let alone David) as the basis of his priesthood—and by extension, his messianic status. But how does this square with the presumed tradition that the messianic claims of the Jesus of the Gospels were *dependent* on him being descended from David? Why does the idea of being Son of David never enter into this writer's discussion of the legitimacy of Jesus' position? If Jesus as the new High Priest needed to be of a different tribe, the writer should not have had to use a scriptural link with Melchizedek; he could simply have appealed to the historical tradition that Jesus of Nazareth was descended from David and was thus of the tribe of Judah, one different from the tribe of the Levites going back to Aaron.

What in fact *is* the stated basis of Jesus' priesthood? It is "the power of an indestructible life." This is given nothing to do with Jesus' life on earth, as 'indestructible' as that could have been seen. Rather, such "power" is rooted in scripture, for the author once again quotes Psalm 110:4. The indestructibility is based on God's declaration that Jesus is a "priest forever"—just as Melchizedek is. For the author has made a bizarre deduction about the latter figure:

Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither a beginning of days nor end of life, but having been made like the Son of God, he remains a priest forever. [7:3]

This conclusion is drawn from the Genesis verses, because they happen to say nothing about their Melchizedek of Salem, neither birth nor death, ancestry nor descent. He becomes a kind of figure suspended in time, and this is turned into the prefiguration of the Son who is also a High Priest without beginning or end. There is a strong implication here that the Son himself is likewise without father or mother or genealogy ("having been made like the Son of God"), having neither a beginning nor an end to his life. While the usual claim is that this is

meant to refer only to his spiritual existence, it cannot be denied that if an actual father, mother and genealogy, a birth and a death, had existed in Jesus' *incarnational* background, an anomaly should have been set up in the minds of both the writer and his readers which would have prompted, even required, qualification. None is given.

True to form, everything to do with Christ's lineage and role as High Priest has been derived from scripture. The "it is evident" (*prodelon*) of 7:14 needs to be seen as a reference to the clarity bestowed by scripture.

A Jesus Never on Earth

At the beginning of chapter 8 lies an innocent looking "time" bomb which most commentators manage to gloss over or ignore completely. There are two ways the first part of 8:4 can be and has been translated, and we will look at them side by side.

If he were on earth, he would not be a priest... [NIV]

Now if he had been on earth, he would not even have been a priest... [NEB]

In the first, which is the more common translation, the thought is placed in the present. The second has the thought placed in the past. In either case, the thought is contrafactual: it is 'a condition contrary to fact.' Whether in past or present, the statement about Jesus being on earth is treated as false. An analogy would be useful, both here and later:

If I had been in Paris in 1888, I could not have climbed the Eiffel Tower because it was at that time under construction.

If I were in Paris today, I could not climb the Eiffel Tower because it is presently undergoing repairs.

Both statements are contrafactual. In the first, I was not in Paris in 1888. In the second, I am not in Paris today.

Let's look at the Hebrews statement from the point of view of its grammatical construction in Greek, considering both translations, present and past:

Ei men oun en epi ges

If, therefore, he were/had been [*en*] on earth,

Oud' an en hiereus

he would not be/have been [*en*] a priest.

[The "*men*" and "*an*" are particles that elucidate meaning but need not be specifically translated themselves.]

The key words are the two appearances of the verb "*en*"—one in each half of the statement. This is the imperfect tense. The general grammatical rule says:

In a contrafactual (a condition contrary to fact) situation, the same tense of the indicative is used in both parts of the statement; the imperfect tense denotes present time, while the aorist or pluperfect tense denotes past time. (See, e.g., J. H. Huddilston, *Essentials of New Testament Greek*, p.208; or E. V. N. Goetchius, *The Language of the New Testament*, p.274-5.)

If we were to apply this general rule, we would be forced to take 8:4 as having a present meaning, since it employs the imperfect tense in both halves. But general rules always permit exceptions, or are seen as not always so clear cut when one gets beyond the generality. Here is what Paul Ellingworth has to say about this passage in his commentary [*Hebrews*, p.405]:

The second difficulty concerns the meaning of the two occurrences of *en*. The imperfect in unreal [contrafactual] conditions is temporally ambiguous (BD §360 [3]), so that NEB 'Now if he had been on earth, he would not even have been a priest' (so Attridge) is grammatically possible. However, it goes against the context, in at least apparently excluding Christ's present ministry, and it could also be misunderstood as meaning that Jesus had never 'been on earth.' Most versions accordingly render: 'If he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all' (REB, NJB; similarly RSV, TEV, NIV..).⁸⁷

Thus, if the imperfect in contrafactual conditions is indeed "temporally ambiguous," we cannot appeal to the general grammatical rule to place verse 4 in the present. (We should also note in passing how preconception can govern scholarly decision-making, in that a past sense is being ruled out, even though "grammatically possible," because it contravenes Gospel-based assumptions.)

The choice, then, lies between an understanding in the present and an understanding in the past. But this is a choice which is absolutely critical. Since the statement is contrafactual, a past understanding would make it a clear denial that Jesus had been on earth in the past. Consequently, to preserve an historical Jesus for this author, the verse must be understood in a present sense. But there are two reasons why it cannot be so understood. One is that such a sense would make the statement so trivial, there would be no reason for the author to make it; and it would in effect be a non-sequitur. The second reason is that a past sense is required by the context. We will start with the second.

A Sacrifice in the Past

Consider our analogy about the Eiffel Tower. If the context of the discussion happens to be the construction of the Tower for the Paris Exposition of 1889, then the statement that if I had been in Paris in 1888 I could not have climbed it would be relevant. The statement that if I were there today I could not do so would be entirely irrelevant; depending on the details of the discussion, it could also be a non-sequitur. So let us consider the context of the Hebrews 8:4 verse. For that, we will back up to the start of the chapter:

'Now, the main point in what is being said is this:

we have such a high priest who sat down at the right hand of the throne of Majesty in heaven,

²a minister in the sanctuary, and in the true tabernacle which the Lord [God] erected, not man.

Now, every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices;

hence, (it is/was) necessary that this one [Jesus] too have something to offer.

The tense of the second part of verse 3 is ambiguous since there is no actual verb stated in the Greek. Grammatically speaking, the 'necessity' may be present or past. The majority of translators express it in the present tense (like their choice in verse 4), but the NEB notes that it could be either "must have something to offer" or "must have *had* something to offer."

Note that verse 3 is introduced in order to make the point that the high priests on earth have *their* duties, while the High Priest in heaven has—or had—*his* duties. What do the duties on both sides constitute here? First we must rule out one interpretation, and for that we need to glance back over preceding verses. 7:24-26 speaks of Jesus as living forever, exercising a permanent priesthood in that he continues to intercede for "those who come to God through him." (This intercession is his only priestly role that is ongoing; his one sacrifice has already been performed.) In this he is like the earthly priests who also intercede, but his intercession is on a superior and more effective level. But then the writer shifts from the subject of intercession to the principal contrast between the earthly and heavenly high priests. It relates to the performance of sacrifices:

²⁷He [the Son] has no need to offer sacrifices daily, as the high priests do, first for his own sins and then for the sins of the people; for this he did once and for all [*ephapax*] when he offered up himself. (*Compare 9:12*: he has entered the sanctuary once for all, obtaining an eternal redemption.)

Here the point is stressed that Jesus' sacrifice, the offering of himself, was done on a single occasion in the heavenly sanctuary, not repeated; and it has already happened (although such an event is never identified as taking place in history, let alone at a specific time in history). This past singularity is in contrast to his subsequent duties, in which he continues to be a "minister" interceding with God on the people's behalf. This is what the earthly priests also do on a regular basis, but through repeated (animal) sacrifices; whereas Jesus no longer needs to offer further sacrifice of himself, and so his ongoing intercession before God does not involve sacrifice.

The opening of chapter 8 follows on this thought. The focus is on Christ *after* his sacrifice has been performed: "we now have a high priest who has sat down at the right hand of God." The reference in verse 2 to him being a "minister in the sanctuary," while possibly ambiguous, probably refers to his continuing post-sacrifice role as intercessor before God.

But then in verse 3, the focus once again shifts. (We must remember that all division and numbering of chapter and verse in the New Testament is the product of a later time and may not always conform to a writer's train of thought, something which scholars occasionally find themselves having to point out.) In verse 3 the author turns his attention to the specific comparison of sacrifices: those made by the priests on earth and that made by Jesus the High Priest in Heaven. To repeat it here:

³NOW, every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices;
hence, (it is/was) necessary that this one, too, have something to offer....

The focus on "gifts and sacrifices" and the idea of the heavenly priest having something to "offer" makes it clear that the writer is no longer speaking of Christ's intercessory duties, since these do not involve the offering of sacrifices. And so verse 3 places us with Christ in the past, since the 'something that he had to offer' was the sacrifice of his own blood in the heavenly sanctuary, and this is regarded as having already happened, "once for all." Thus, the NEB alternate translation for 3b is correct: "he *must have had* something to offer." Since his single sacrifice is in the past, a translation of "he *must have* something to offer" (in the present) would be contradictory and meaningless. The first part of the verse uses a present tense because it is a general and ongoing condition, the earthly high priests performing their sacrifices; but a past tense belongs in the second part because it is a specific case that has already taken place. In this juxtaposition, the latter governs the sense, and thus the writer is setting up a comparison between the earthly and heavenly priests whose point is located *in the past, referring to the time when Christ actually made his sacrifice*.

The consequences for verse 4 which immediately follows should be evident. First, let us ask what is the purpose of this verse? The author will be going on in chapters 8 and 9 to describe how Christ's heavenly sacrifice was more perfect, and what its points of comparison and contrast with the earthly prototype are. But before doing that he enlarges on his point in verse 3—about both kinds of priest having performed their own respective offerings—by giving us verse 4:

If he were/had been on earth, he would not be/have been a priest,
there being ["*ontdn*"] ones [*i.e., earthly priests*] offering the gifts according
to the Law...⁸⁸

This verse is actually a rather trivial thought, and quite unnecessary, but how fortunate for us that he expressed it! In verse 2 (cf. verse 5), he has placed Christ in the "true" heavenly tabernacle, one built by God, not man; so it should be evident to the reader, not only from these verses but from the presentation of Christ's sacrifice in the epistle as a whole (which we can assume represents the community's thinking), that Christ offers his gifts and sacrifices *in his own—heavenly—territory*, while the earthly high priests do so in theirs, the sanctuary on earth. That opposition in regard to location is inherently clear. This would make verse 4 largely superfluous, no matter what time sense it might be given.

Regardless, what the author has done is stress the point that both function, or functioned, exclusively in their own locations, for in verse 4 he is simply adding the idea that Christ, if on earth, would not be or have been a priest, since there are already priests there who perform the business of sacrifice. This somewhat awkward remark does nothing more than serve to illustrate the author's point that each kind of priesthood, with its particular type of sacrifice, has or had its own venue, one on earth and one in Heaven. Christ could not be a priest on earth because that is where the temple high priests operate. He is also emphasizing that Christ's sacrifice does not belong in the earthly temple or on the earthly scene, because that is not his territory and because his type of perfect once-for-all sacrifice took place—indeed, *had* to take place—in Heaven.⁸⁹

But in view of this, is it any longer possible to allow for a present sense in verse 4? Verse 3 has said that each type of priest (earthly priests / heavenly priest) has/had its own type of sacrifice, with verse 4, along with much else in the epistle, telling us that each is assigned to its own territory. Most important, those respective sacrifices involve on one side—that of Christ—a sacrifice which must be placed in the past. Christ was a priest in the role of performing a sacrifice *in the past and only in the past*. He has not performed and will not perform that sacrifice again. Of what relevance or use, then, would it be to say that he could not be a priest if on earth in the present? It would be an utterly trivial point and essentially a non-sequitur. If the comparison has been between sacrifices performed in the past, with that of Jesus possible *only* in the past, there would be no point in saying that if he were on earth today Jesus would have nothing to do.

Nor could the reason for having nothing to do be because his once-for-all sacrifice has already taken place (which would be a theoretically valid though pointless observation), since that is not the reason stated. That reason is the presence of priests on earth with their own role of performing sacrifices, thereby excluding Jesus from performing his. Such an exclusionary relationship between the two compels the thought to relate to a situation in which Jesus' sacrifice *could* be involved—and that situation existed only in the past. The 'once for all' specification has *restricted* it to the past. There is no situation in the present in which Jesus would ever be involved in regard to making a sacrifice, so the distinction made in verse 4 cannot apply to any theoretical present situation. The very concept of a sacrifice by Jesus in the present is ruled out, so there could be no reason for the writer to even *think* of the verse 4 statement in a present-time sense, let alone offer it to his readers as having any significance.⁹⁰

To further illustrate this reasoning, we might note that it also rules out the idea that Jesus had performed his sacrifice *on earth* in the past (following the scholarly tendency to regard the heavenly-sanctuary setting as being a metaphor for Calvary). In such a context, there would be no reason for the writer to state that Jesus could not be crucified again *on earth in the present*, and especially for the reason that there are now priests on earth performing their own sacrifices. That would be gibberish. Jesus could not be crucified again because he has *already* been crucified; and priests killing animals in the temple at the same time would hardly exclude an earthly crucifixion. (The Gospel of John, in fact, creates that very juxtaposition in his Passion account.) There could be no more reason or desire on the part of Hebrews' author to state that Christ *in the present* could not perform his sacrifice, on earth and in the presence of earthly priests.

A further contradiction can be seen in the present-time sense when attempting to apply historicist orthodoxy. If Jesus in the present could not be a priest on earth because there are already temple priests here performing sacrifices, did not that very situation exist in the past when he *was* on earth? How could the author make such a denial for the present time when it was actually the case in the past? Why make such an observation about the present, when its opposite was the case

at the much more important time of Jesus' life? One cannot get around this by pointing out that he was not actually a priest on earth in the past since the sacrifice did not take place until he got to Heaven; in that case, Christ *by definition* was a priest only in heaven, and thus there could be no need for the author to state that he could not be a priest on earth in the present, for *whatever* reason.⁹¹

This, by the way, would be an acknowledgement that Hebrews is indeed presenting a sacrifice that takes place in Heaven. Such would rule out the heavenly scenario being a metaphor for the event on earth and once more raise the perplexing question of why the author did *not* see the Calvary scene as part of the sacrifice, part of Christ's high priestly role.

Contrafactual Alternatives

There is another consideration which precludes understanding verse 4 in a present sense. Verse 4 is offered as a contrafactual alternative to verse 3. In verse 3, the writer has presented both high priests, the earthly and the heavenly, each performing his own sacrifice, with that of Christ having taken place in "the tent pitched by the Lord and not by man" (v.2), meaning in Heaven. This is a statement of compatibility; each one was able to perform his sacrifice *in his own venue*. That compatibility is a past condition: one existing at the time of Christ's own sacrifice, in the past; it has no application in the present. Verse 4 then follows to offer an observation about a theoretical / $\wedge$ -compatibility, in contrast to the past compatibility of verse 3. But for that juxtaposition to be applicable, for it to make any sense, the verse 4 situation must be positioned at the same time as the verse 3 situation. If the verse 3 compatibility exists in the past, the theoretical verse 4 incompatibility must be in the past as well. Otherwise, if given a present-time sense, it is a complete non-sequitur, and there is no perceivable reason why the author would state it.⁹²

The pointlessness of Hebrews 8:4 in a present-time sense could be further highlighted by a different analogy. The writer would no more talk about Christ not being a priest today than we would say,

Ronald Reagan, if he were living now, would not be President, because we already have a man filling that office.

In the same way as Christ's sacrifice, Ronald Reagan's presidency was by definition confined to the past. There is no relevance to anything pertaining to his past presidency to note that he would not be President today, especially for the reason given. But we can further reveal the problem under discussion by considering an amendment to our Reagan analogy:

Ronald Reagan, who served two presidencies which is all that is allowed in the Constitution, could not be a President today, because there is already someone filling that office.

Here, the sufficient and governing reason for him not being a President today is given in the first part of the statement; he has already had his allowable run.

The second part offers another reason entirely, ignoring the already existing disqualification in the first part. This is precisely the case in Christ's situation. He has already served as priest in regard to making sacrifices; he has made his once-for-all sacrifice. Hebrews' Constitution does not allow for another one.

The point is, if 8:4 is given a present-time sense it is guilty of the same inconsistency as our second Reagan analogy. If Christ has already made his sacrifice in the past (whether in Heaven or on earth), if he has filled his role as a priest in that once-for-all regard, then he could not do so again in the present under any circumstances. The writer does not need to have his priesthood on earth precluded by the presence of other priests on earth at the same time. The only way such an inconsistency is avoided is to give the verse a past-time sense. *At the time that he was making his sacrifice in the past*, he could not have done so if he had been on earth. The reason given—legitimate, relevant, or not—was because other sacrifices by other priests were going on, and each could only take place within their respective venues; but there was no separate or antecedent disqualification existing at the time of that past once-for-all sacrifice.

To sum up, the writer of Hebrews is offering a contrafactual alternative to verse 3's past sacrifice in heaven, making the point that Christ's sacrifice could not *have been* performed on earth. Thus we arrive at the meaning for verses 3-4: "All high priests are appointed to make sacrifices, so this High Priest [Christ] had to have his own sacrifice to make [it was in heaven, and it was once-for-all in the past]; if he had been on earth [at that past time], he could not have performed such a priestly sacrifice, since there were already priests on earth performing such things." While the author's reasoning might be questionable, *by including the phrase "if he had been on earth," which is contrafactual, he is making the statement that Jesus had not been on earth in the past.*

This is what makes Hebrews 8:4 a smoking gun (and why I can beg the reader's forgiveness for giving it so much attention).

The requirement of separation and exclusiveness between the two types of priests and sacrifices is an expression of the Platonic influence and distinction which the writer and his philosophy are committed to: the principle that type and antitype do not, and cannot, inhabit the same sphere; that the 'perfect' act Christ performed could only take place in the perfect realm of Heaven. In Hebrews' presentation of Christ's sacrifice, the author endorses that principle at every turn.

And this leads us to conclude with an entirely different dimension of the argument.

Coping with Complications

Just as we have seen in 1 Corinthians 15:44-49, that the presence of a human body for Christ would compromise, even destroy, Paul's comparison between Adam and Christ, between the physical and the spiritual, so too in Hebrews would a death on earth for the High Priest Jesus throw a monkey wrench into the carefully crafted system of heavenly-earthly counterparts. If the author thought that Christ had been on earth and crucified on Calvary, he too, like modern

scholars, would surely have found it impossible not to regard that earthly phase as part of the sacrifice. Indeed, several scholars have imposed that understanding on him. But if he were to regard Calvary as part of the sacrifice, then Christ has *de facto* performed—at least partially—his sacrifice on earth. His priesthood would have been in part conducted on earth, and thus the direct statements that Christ has performed—and had to perform—his sacrifice in a sanctuary not made by man (8:2), not belonging to this created world (9:11), would be incorrect, or would need to be qualified. If Christ's sacrifice taking place in Heaven is regarded as making it 'perfect, spiritual and eternal' (9:11-14 [NEB]), if cleansing heavenly things requires a heavenly sacrifice (9:23), then such claims are foiled if part of the sacrifice was in fact not heavenly at all. And if it was performed in the same venue as the sacrifices of the earthly priests, this would produce an outright incompatibility with the statement of 8:4.

This is really the crux of the matter. If a crucifixion on Calvary had taken place, it is hardly conceivable that this would not have been brought into the picture and made part of Christ's priesthood—and thus Hebrews' whole presentation would of necessity have been different. In fact, other opportunities would have presented themselves. For example, one of the roles of the priesthood is to slaughter the animals which provide the blood for the sacrifice. Why would this element be ignored if the slaughter of Christ had taken place on Calvary, inviting a comparison and parallel between these two priestly acts (Christ performing it on himself) in keeping with all the rest? Even if the primary focus were kept on a blood-atonement sacrifice made on the heavenly altar, such things would have justified including an openly earthly dimension as part of Christ's priesthood.

But then the writer would have been overwhelmed with all those pesky complications. Wasn't the blood human and not spiritual? Wasn't a human act in the material world by definition "imperfect"? Since Calvary was a key event in salvation and thus of the New Covenant, wasn't it taking place at the same time and in the same venue as the old earthly acts of atonement under the Old Covenant? Didn't the exclusive territories the writer is at pains to delineate in fact overlap? Even if he could have found ways out of these complications and others like them, he would have had to outline his solutions, to show some recognition that he was aware of the conflict. On the other hand, the likelihood is that he would simply have avoided such a conflict by not fashioning his particular christological picture in the first place.

It might be claimed that even if he does not *define* the sacrifice outright as including the suffering and death which preceded the bringing of the blood into the heavenly sanctuary, does the writer not treat it as of some importance, a necessary part of the picture? It is given a significant role in chapter 2, in the "test of suffering" which parallels that of the believers, and in the obedience learned through suffering in chapter 5, and the enduring of the cross in chapter 12. Would not this show that if pressed, he would have had to include it in the picture of the sacrifice, even if he seems to have deliberately avoided doing so in

his presentation, for whatever reason? Perhaps so, but if he were pressed to include it, he could have done so on the basis *that this suffering and death did not take place on earth*. If those additional parts of the sacrifice were viewed as taking place in the heavens, none of the complications related to a location in the physical realm would be in play—complications which he shows no sign of being aware of.

In fact, regarding the suffering and death as also taking place in the spiritual world might explain why it has been ignored as part of the sacrifice. Since for this writer scripture's major focus was on the sacrifice in the heavenly sanctuary, the death itself could be left aside (as was the resurrection); whereas a suffering and death in history, on Calvary, would have been much more 'visible' and intrusive, demanding inclusion in the fashioning of Jesus' sacrifice. The writer would not have been able to leave it in the background.

The thought of Hebrews 8:4 is an acknowledgment that, according to the writer's governing philosophy, the divine sacrifice could not be enacted in the imperfect realm, in contiguity with imperfect sacrifices; each had to have its own counterpart setting. (This in itself is a Platonic thought, whereas one would be hard put to see the writer imagining a conflict within scholarship's preferred Jewish context, since anticipated eschatological antitypes are often envisioned on earth.) Therefore, he is saying that Jesus' saving act did *not* take place on earth. If Jesus had been sacrificed and produced his blood on Calvary, that dividing line and necessary condition of exclusive demarcation would have been shattered, and his whole treatise would have been foiled.

Literal or Metaphorical?

While the writer has been casting glances ahead at the particulars of Christ's sacrifice in the heavenly sanctuary (as have we), it is only with chapter 9 that we arrive at the presentation of that scene. He has pointed out (8:5) that even Moses had to conform to Platonic-Semitic principles when he was directed to set up the first tabernacle in Sinai: "See that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain," a pattern that existed in Heaven. Hebrews' picture of the earthly vs. heavenly tabernacles and what went on within them will follow the same principle.

Chapter 9:1-10 describes the traditional earthly tabernacle and the activities of the earthly priests. Against this is set (9:11-14) Christ's service as High Priest:

"But when Christ appeared as High Priest of the good things that have come [or, that are to come], then through the greater and more perfect tent/tabernacle, not made with hands, that is, not of this creation,
¹²he entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

We have no reason not to take this as intended to be an actual heavenly scene, a literal event in the spiritual realm, one interpreted out of scripture. There is no implication in such graphic language that the author is presenting it as a mere symbol of Calvary, and he makes a point of specifying the tabernacle as

"not of this creation." He will say even more directly in 9:24: "For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence." The "heaven itself" must mean the heavenly sanctuary, in parallel with the man-made one of earth.

Yet here is where we encounter resolute resistance in modern scholarship. The key question is: What does this heavenly scene constitute? How literally is the writer envisioning it? What does it mean to say that Christ "took his own blood" and "offered his own blood" in the heavenly sanctuary? Has the author created an imaginative and elaborate metaphor for something that actually took place on earth? In view of the specific parallel set up in the document, portraying in literal fashion the entry of the earthly high priests into the earthly tabernacle to smear the blood of sacrificed animals on the altar and gain forgiveness for the people's sins, it would be difficult to maintain that the carefully crafted portrayal of Christ's parallel actions with his own blood in the spiritual realm of Heaven was not also to be taken in literal fashion, especially when the author provides no explanation otherwise, no hint that he is in fact referring to an earthly event or an earthly "sacrificial death."

One argument employed by scholars relates to something considered earlier, that Hebrews' higher-lower 'vertically' pattern is not Platonic at all, but simply derived from earlier Semitic tradition, the "general oriental idea that every earthly sanctuary is a copy of a heavenly sanctuary."⁹³ But it is one thing for something as holy as a sanctuary to require a "model" in heaven; one can see the things of God on earth prompting the idea that they have been built at heaven's direction (as in the Mosaic sanctuary of 8:5). It might be maintained that this owes nothing to Platonism. But it is another matter to have things actually *go on* in that heavenly model, and to have those activities themselves be part of the higher-lower/perfect-imperfect comparison pattern. This goes beyond traditional Semitic precedents.

Those counterpart actions are described in 9:13-14:

¹³For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh,

¹⁴how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

The "blood of Christ" has been set in parallel with the Old Covenant's sprinkling of the blood of animals, and thus the phrase logically refers to an equivalent action by Christ in the heavenly sanctuary—as bizarre as that may strike us today. Both types of sacrifice are for "purification" in an atonement sense. Under Moses, the death was of goats and calves, with the blood of those animals being sprinkled on the altar, on the vessels, the holy book, and the people themselves (9:19). To this action, Christ's own death and the bearing of his blood into the sanctuary for sprinkling on the heavenly altar are in parallel, and ought to be taken as a parallel between two actions intended as real, not between a real one and a metaphor.

But another parallel is notably missing, particularly if the portrayal of Christ's sacrifice is meant to represent his actions on earth. The author has noted that Moses, in sprinkling the animal blood, spoke the words recorded in scripture to establish the Old Covenant: "This is the blood of the covenant which God has enjoined upon you." But where is the natural and compelling parallel with the words of Christ spoken at the Last Supper: Jesus offering the bread and wine and identifying them with his body and blood as a symbol of the New Covenant? The author would hardly have passed this up had he known of any such tradition. Even if he knew no Gospel (and he surely did not), any claim that Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 represent a circulating tradition about the Gospels' Last Supper would have to indicate that there should have been no reason for the Hebrews community not to be familiar with it.⁹⁴

The picture of and comparison between the old and the new, between earth and Heaven, makes it clear that the writer is not referring to the *death* of Jesus as the act of redemption. The death is treated, quite naturally, as a prerequisite, whether in the case of earthly animals or the heavenly Son. But it is in both cases the *usage of the blood* obtained through the death which is the focus of the atoning sacrifice. Moses' sprinkling of it established the Old Covenant, not the death itself of the animal. Similarly, it is Christ's offering of his own blood in the heavenly sanctuary which has procured forgiveness; it is through that act, not his death *per se*, that he is the "mediator of the new covenant."⁹⁵

Since all the parallels drawn by the author between the biblical prototype and Christ's heavenly act are nowhere suggested to involve metaphor, the "blood" used by Christ in the heavenly sanctuary as an offering to God should not be regarded as anything but literal—in, of course, a spiritual context. This is the literal spiritual blood of the god Christ. (Just as Christ's "spiritual body," to Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:44f, is a literal body, but one made of "heavenly stuff.") To our sensibilities, since we no longer hold Platonic views of the universe or regard blood sacrifice as anything but primitive, Hebrews' presentation of Christ's heavenly sacrifice is more than faintly mawkish and repugnant. Rightly sensitive scholars feel constrained to turn it all into metaphor to make it palatable to modern audiences, as well as to themselves.⁹⁶

That sacrifices could be offered in heaven is also shown in the Testament of Levi, third part of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs (a Hellenized Jewish document of the 2nd century BCE with "additions" which scholars have labeled Christian). In chapter 3, sacrifices are depicted as offered to God in a heavenly temple, by angels of the third heaven. (For this writer, the layers of the heavens number only three.) This third sphere contains an archetypal sanctuary whose copy is the temple on earth. Here the archangels "offer propitiatory sacrifices to the Lord on behalf of all the sins of ignorance of the righteous ones.... They present to the Lord a pleasing odor," though they are declared to be "bloodless." (See "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs" in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol.2, p.789.) Hebrews' blood sacrifice of Christ in a heavenly sanctuary could be regarded as an advance on precedents like the Testament of Levi.

Entering Heaven

But now we come to a critical passage, 9:24-26:

²⁴For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that is only a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in God's presence on our behalf.

²⁵Not that he would offer himself there again and again, as the high priest enters the sanctuary year by year with blood not his own;

^{26a}for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly from the foundation of the world... [NEB/RSV]

This entry into Heaven (v.24) is the focal point of the author's picture of salvation effected by Christ, not the death and not Calvary. What that "entry" comprises is clear from verse 25: it is the sacrificial offering of himself, namely of his blood. Verse 26a points to the necessary prelude to that offering, the death that would produce the blood of the sacrifice itself. In the context of an historical Jesus, this 'suffering repeatedly' would have been a bizarre thought to express, even theoretically. It would entail Jesus being incarnated repeatedly so as to die on earth and enter the heavenly sanctuary each time to offer the blood from each crucifixion. But if it all happens in the spiritual layers of heaven, among angels, gods and demons, and if the sole focus is on the act in the heavenly sanctuary with the preceding death never specified as on earth, such an idea of theoretically repeating the process would not be altogether infeasible or outlandish. The thought itself spells a cosmic Christ, not a human one.

The phrase "from the foundation of the world" is a curious thought as well. Incarnated repeatedly since the beginning of time? That would be a silly idea in the context of an historical Jesus, akin to saying "Columbus would have had to discover America many times since the start of sea-travel." But neither would be ludicrous in a mythical context, if repetition were theoretically envisioned.⁹⁷

When we get to verse 26b, we arrive at the crux of the entire document. In these few words, we can see that no historical event is in view.

...but now, once, at the completion of the ages, he has been manifested/ revealed [*or*, he has appeared: *pephanerdai*, the verb *phaneroo*] to put away sin by his sacrifice.

Phaneroo in the passive voice strictly means to *be* revealed, although efforts are made, in the case of Jesus, to have it mean 'to reveal (or manifest/present) oneself in an active sense, so as to better justify an understanding of incarnation. Such an active understanding of the passive voice is possible, in the sense of 'to be revealed/presented by oneself; and it could even be preferable here. But does it signify incarnation? I have pointed out that usage of this language would be an obscure way to refer to incarnation and a life on earth, especially when it could easily have been stated much more plainly. Yet in the context of the present discussion, this is virtually beside the point. For what does Christ do on this self-revealing 'appearance' in 9:26b? He performs his "sacrifice." Throughout the epistle, this has meant one thing and one thing only: the entry into the heavenly

sanctuary and the offering there of his blood. Thus, verse 26b must refer to the same thing. Christ is "appearing" (presenting himself) *in Heaven*. There is no necessary understanding of an earthly event anywhere in the picture.

That this heavenly event is in mind has also been demonstrated in 9:24. To repeat:

For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that is only a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in God's presence on our behalf.

Governed by the first half of the sentence, the second half must refer specifically to the heavenly sanctuary which Christ enters bearing his blood as an atoning sacrifice to God. It cannot refer to Christ's intercessory duties, since these extend into the future, and the whole passage is a discussion of the singular sacrificial act.

This is the act which seems to have been performed "at the completion of the ages" two verses later in 26b. To repeat:

...but *now*, once, at the completion of the ages, he has appeared to put away sin by his sacrifice.

The two 'now's' *\nuri* in these two verses reflect the same thought; they apply to the same event. Moreover, the intervening verses 25 and 26a further refer to the event of entering Heaven and offering himself, but making the point that he did not have to perform this act repeatedly. Consequently, if the next thought (v.26b) is presented as a contrast to this and says that he only had to perform this act "once," it logically follows that this *singular* 'act' is identical to the theoretical *multiple* act it has been contrasted with. The act performed once is the same as the act not needing multiple performance. *Thus, both references are to the act of entry into the heavenly sanctuary to offer the sacrifice of his blood.*

Thus the "appearing" in verse 26b is not a reference to incarnation and an event on earth. And if it is the heavenly act which is identified as the event which takes place "at the completion of the ages," then the author can hardly be aware of an earthly act which has taken place within the same time frame. He would not restrict himself to including only the heavenly act in what has happened in the present time if Jesus' life and crucifixion on Calvary had also occurred.

Yet it is the latter which is consistently read into the background by traditional scholarship, which interprets 26b as a suddenly out-of-place reference to Jesus' appearance on earth. That would make verse 26b be saying: 'Christ appeared on earth in order to offer his blood in the heavenly sanctuary.' Rather, the author is making an "As it is..." statement following on the previous thoughts: as opposed to Christ entering a man-made sanctuary like the priests on earth (v.24), and as opposed to him having to make repeated sacrifices like the earthly priests there (v.25), the author declares that Christ "appeared" only once to perform his sacrifice. The natural and logical flow of thought is that this "appearing"—like the one in verse 24—was in Heaven and it refers to the act in the heavenly sanctuary. Twisting it into a reference to the incarnation and the crucifixion on Calvary is to perform extreme violence on the text.

One question needs further examination: how should we understand what it is that is happening at "the completion of the ages"? It seems to be the appearing in heaven to offer the sacrifice, but is it something else? Is there more to it than has been indicated thus far? This will be considered in the next chapter, a survey of how the epistles as a whole conceive of the "when" of Christ's sacrifice.

A Second Coming?

Having established that Hebrews 9:26 does not refer to an arrival on earth, but to the appearance of Christ and his act in Heaven, we can deal with the following verses which are claimed to be the one clear reference in the epistles to a "second" coming of Christ. There are two ways it can be taken which do not involve a 'return to earth.'

27

Inasmuch as it is destined for men to die once, and after that comes the judgment,

28

so also Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, *ek deuteron* will appear to those awaiting him, not to bear sin but (to bring) salvation.

The "*ek deuteron*" is regularly translated "a second time," as it is in Matthew 26:42, where it refers in the Gethsemane scene to Jesus going away "a second time" to pray. But the phrase, like its sister "to *deuteron*," can also mean "second in sequence," without any thought of repetition of the first item but simply that of "next" or "second in time." This meaning we find in several passages, where it does not entail repetition, such as:

Jude 5 - ...that the Lord, after saving the people out of Egypt, subsequently [*to deuteron*] destroyed those who did not believe. [NASB]

1 Corinthians 12:28 - And in the church God has appointed first of all prophets, second [*deuteron*] prophets, third teachers... [NIV]

When we compare the parallel between the statements in Hebrews 27 and 28, we find that the "next" idea is more fitting than the "second time" idea. In the first case, it is men dying once, followed by the judgment—a sequence, not a repetition. The second case, involving Christ, to be in parallel, should be a sequence as well: first an offering of himself for sin, followed by an appearing to those awaiting him to bring salvation.

Even more significant is the verb described as "*ek deuteron*." "He will appear" is *ophthesetai*, the future passive of *horad*. This means "to see, behold." In the passive it means "to appear, to reveal oneself" (much like the passive of *phaneroo*). This verb is consistently used to refer to single-occasion appearances, a "seeing" such as the post-resurrection sightings of Jesus in the Gospels, or the visionary experiencing of the spiritual Christ by those listed in 1 Corinthians 15:5-8, or Moses and Elijah appearing on the mountain in the Transfiguration scene. Now, Christ coming at the End-time would be an appearance of this sort, but should this kind of appearance be considered as a "second time" to the incarnation? Such a "first time" would decidedly not be an appearance of this

nature, and the incarnation would not be a "first time" of such a future appearance. In that case, the repetition idea would not apply.

On the other hand, we might feasibly understand a "second time" appearance if there were a "first time" appearance of a similar nature, so that the second could be thought of as a repetition of the first. The author nowhere spells out one of these first-time appearances, although there could be one lurking in the revelation experience that launched the sect as described in 2:1-4. But it is also possible that the 'second' appearing is being set against a 'first' appearing which refers to the 'presenting of himself which took place in the heavenly sanctuary (9:24); and indeed, the latter is the very thing mentioned in the first part of the statement (28a), against which is set the appearing to those awaiting him. So we may, after all, have a thought which not only reflects a sequence, but a 'second-time' appearance, the first being the appearance *in Heaven*, the second *out of Heaven*. Both are 'single-occasion' appearances and thus reasonably compatible for comparison, whereas the incarnation and the Parousia are much less so.

The issue of this verse may not be one that can be settled conclusively in either direction, but any confident declaration that it represents the concept of a Second Coming in the orthodox sense must be set aside.

The Coming One

However, confidence is much better achieved in the other direction in regard to a similar statement made in the next chapter. The readers are being urged to hold fast in the face of the persecution which has recently assailed them, and by way of encouragement the writer quotes Habakkuk 2:3 in the Septuagint version, prefaced by a phrase from Isaiah:

³⁶You need to persevere, so that when you have done the will of God you will receive what he has promised.

³⁷For "in just a little while" [Isaiah 26:20 LXX] "The coming one [*ho erchomenos*] will come, and will not delay."

Habakkuk was referring to God by "*ho erchomenos*," but in later times this became a prophetic reference to the Messiah, and the phrase was adopted as a title to refer to him. If anything, this is a more obvious passage than 8:4 to tell us that Christ had not been on earth. If "the Coming One" refers to Christ, the Savior figure of this community, and he is someone prophesied in scripture, then if he is still to come it follows that he has not come previously. Scripture may have been seen as prophesying the coming of a Messiah at the point of the world's transformation, the apocalyptic End-time, but early Christians are supposed to have reinterpreted that to refer to Christ's incarnation, and in that context we can assume that the writer of Hebrews would have shared in this reinterpretation.

Consequently, if an historical Jesus existed in the writer's past, the Habakkuk prophecy should have been applied to that first advent. This is how his readers would have understood it. He could not have passed over that first coming in silence and directed the prophecy at the future Parousia without qualification or

explanation. (The writer would hardly ignore the first coming simply because it had been in a human incarnation while the second would be in a heavenly state.) If "the Coming One" had already come, he would have had to specify 'return' or 'again.' Moreover, by ignoring the life of Christ on earth, he would have been tacitly dismissing any benefit or encouragement to be found in what Jesus had said or done in that life as a means of giving hope to his persecuted readers. Clearly, as the writer has expressed things, the scriptural promise of Christ's arrival on earth has not yet been fulfilled.

In 1900, witnessing the rise of German militarism under the Kaiser, the Englishman Mr. Smith makes a prediction that "we will one day be at war with Germany."

In 1930, witnessing the rise of Hitler and Nazism, Mr. Jones says, "soon Mr. Smith's prediction is going to come true and we will be at war with Germany."

Mr. Brown objects, "But Mr. Smith's prediction has already come true. We were at war with Germany only a few years ago."

"Are you sure?" asks Mr. Jones. "I guess I must have missed it."

And so have quite a few other writers of the New Testament, who in a similar way seem infected with memory loss. Paul, at the end of 1 Corinthians entreates the Lord to "come," *Marana tha*. The writer of Revelation, in his closing words, echoes the same prophetic words from Habakkuk that were quoted in Hebrews: "He who testifies to these things says: 'Yes, I am coming soon'."

— iii —

Jesus Past and Future

A Body for Sacrifice

It was seen earlier that the quote from Psalm 40:68 (LXX) in 10:5 was taken as the voice of the Son ("he says") speaking in scripture and addressing God:

Thou hast prepared a body for me. . . I have come, O God, to do thy will.

God's 'will' is that the Son sacrifice the body prepared for him and then to offer its blood in the heavenly sanctuary. If this is a scriptural prediction of Christ's incarnation and death on Calvary, the author has given himself the perfect opening to make the point that history fulfilled the prophecy. We would certainly expect it from a writer who has focused throughout on past leading to future, scripture leading to later reality, and who—allegedly—expresses himself according to Jewish linear principles. Yet there is not a murmur about historical fulfillment. Instead, following the quote, the author indicates its meaning:

^sFirst he says, "Sacrifices and offerings, whole-offerings and sin-offerings, thou didst not desire nor delight in" (although the Law prescribes them);

⁹and then he says, "I have come to do thy will." He thus annuls the former to establish the latter. [NEB]

The statement "I have come to do thy will" is treated, *as it stands in scripture*, as illustrating the act which has annulled the Old Covenant and established the New. It is presented as the *embodiment* of that act, as though there is nothing else to represent it. Not history, not the memory of an actual man, but simply the picture created by the words of scripture, the heavenly reality lying behind those words. To illustrate this all-important act of Christ, this is all he has to offer. There are no words of Jesus on earth, no scene on Calvary where that body suffered and was sacrificed, no interpretation of the historical act itself. The author goes on (v. 15-17) to offer further 'testimony' illustrating the significance of the Jesus event and the establishment of the New Covenant:

¹⁵The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. After saying,

¹⁶"This is the covenant I will make with them..." [etc.: Jeremiah 31:33-34]

But this further "testimony" is, as might be expected, from scripture. The writer seems to have no interest in historical traditions to do with an earthly event. Or perhaps it is that he has no knowledge of such a thing.

Exemplars for Faith

In chapter 11, the writer offers a series of examples of people in the Old Testament who had faith. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Joseph, Moses are all paraded before the reader as an encouragement to the community to remain faithful in the face of adversity. Others, from Gideon to David, Samuel to "the prophets," all these "overthrew kingdoms, established justice, saw God's promises fulfilled...Others were tortured to death...faced jeers and flogging, even fetters and prison bars; they were stoned...put to the sword, went about dressed in skins of sheep or goats..."

Yet not one example is offered from the scenario now familiar to us from the Gospels. No Jesus who established justice, who himself faced jeers and flogging, no John the Baptist, Jesus' herald, who dressed in animal skins and was imprisoned and put to the sword, no Paul or Peter who ended up behind prison bars, no James or Stephen who were both stoned to death.⁹⁸ When we get to 12:1, the writer refers to all those figures he has just laid out in chapter 11, .

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us...

This indicates that he has been keen to offer as many examples as possible. Yet he has given his readers not a single witness from the Christian movement itself, no figure from that world who could serve as a demonstration of faith. The writer seems unaware of them all, including any of those apostles who allegedly died for their faith in Jesus—according to the common apologetic claim about the fate of such apostles, a claim on which more than just the Epistle to the Hebrews is silent and uncorroborating.

The reference to "Timothy" in the last four verses of the epistle following on 13:21 (the latter having the marks of being the original ending) is not authentic, as these must be seen as an addendum from some time later than the rest of the document. Appendix 4 (p.668) presents the case for this important conclusion.

Jesus on the Cross

This passage in Chapter 12 is often appealed to:

²Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

³For consider him who has endured such opposition from sinful men [lit., by sinners against himself], so you will not grow weary and lose heart. [NIV]

This bare mention of the cross does nothing to elucidate the nature and location of the crucifixion, whether earthly or heavenly, and there is no echo of the resurrection in flesh. Could verse 3 be a reference to the Sanhedrin, or Pilate, or the Pharisees, or perhaps those who took part in Jesus' execution? But the idea is offered to provide a parallel to the experience of the readers who themselves have been subjected to persecution by "sinful men." For this, the author need merely have some scriptural precedent in mind which he could identify with the Son. God himself (not on earth) endured the hostility or rebellion of sinful men in the course of scriptural history, so it would not be a stretch for the author to imagine that the Son, too, could be thought of as having suffered the same thing.

A pointer to this lies in the fact that, typical of Hebrews, the reference itself is derived and adapted from scripture. In Numbers 16:38 (LXX), Core, Dathan and Abiron have rebelled against Moses, for which the earth swallows them up. God then directs Moses to sanctify the censers of "these sinners against their own souls." In Hebrews we find the phrase now reading, "sinners against himself," the latter being Christ. But might the original reading in 12:3 have been "sinners against *themselves*"? And in fact there is just such a variant in some manuscripts. (See Hugh Montefiore, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, p.216, who accepts the variant reading. Jean Hering [*op.cit.*, p.109] translates the passage to mean that he endured hostility *for the sake of sinners*.) The passage is too indistinct to place any reliance on it in an historical direction.

The Heavenly Jerusalem

In his final peroration, 12:18-29, the author sets the Old Covenant against the New Covenant. You have not come, he says, to a mountain of fire (referring to Mount Sinai) with its fearsome sights and thundering voice of the Lord. You have come to Mount Zion, to the city of heavenly Jerusalem, with

its myriads of angels, the assembly and church of the first-born enrolled in the heavens, God the judge of all, and the spirits of good men made perfect, and Jesus the mediator of a new covenant.

This is no earthly scene. It has been imagined out of scripture and apocalyptic expectation. Not only is the New Covenant represented by nothing on earth, no Mount of Calvary, no event of the Passion, no resurrection, but the author has once again affirmed his Platonic reworking of traditional Jewish linearity. The Old Covenant was established on earth, the New one is set in Heaven, at the city of heavenly Jerusalem. As with the sacrifices, the prototype existed in inferior

form on earth; the antitype now exists in perfect form in Heaven, awaiting its attainment by believers and its revelation to the world. No word is spent on the history-to-history progression of the Jewish linearity alleged by scholarship.

We might note here that Paul gives us an identical progression of motifs in his allegory of the two sons of Abraham in Galatians 4:21-27. The two women, Hagar and Sarah, "stand for two covenants." The old covenant is identified with Abraham's concubine Hagar and Mount Sinai, which "represents the Jerusalem of today." But Sarah, the free wife who gave birth to Isaac, represents the heavenly Jerusalem; "she is our mother," the people of the new covenant. From Paul to Hebrews, the mount of Calvary has failed to make any impression on early Christian writers, who universally ignore it as a motif symbolizing the birth of the new age of salvation.

Most telling is the picture of the old and new "voices." Hebrews 12:25 says:

See that you do not refuse him who speaks. For if those ones did not escape when they refused to hear him who warned them on earth, how much less will we (escape) if we turn away from the one who speaks from heaven?

The first part of the second sentence refers to the voice of God at Mt. Sinai. But the "one who speaks from heaven" in the final phrase is also the voice of God, who speaks a quotation from the prophet Haggai 2:6: "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." First of all, we ought to note a close resemblance of thought between these verses and earlier ones in chapter 2:

12:25 - For if those ones [*the Israelites of the Exodus*] did not escape when they refused to hear him who warned them on earth, how much less will we (escape) if we turn away from the one who speaks from heaven?

2:2-3 - For if the message [*at Sinai*] spoken by angels was unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just punishment, how shall we escape, if we ignore so great a salvation which was first spoken through the Lord?

Not a single scholar I am aware of allows the later verse to influence the meaning of the earlier. In 12:25, with its juxtaposition of old and new, the voice that is heard in the context of the New Covenant is the voice of God, not Jesus. It is "the voice that speaks from heaven," the same as spoke at Sinai, as verse 26 states. Thus, in a similar juxtaposition of old and new (and similar language), the common interpretation that the chapter 2 passage refers to the hearing of Jesus of Nazareth by his followers cannot stand. That voice, too, must be the voice of God, and thus it cannot be a reference to Jesus and his historical ministry, but only to a revelatory experience in which the voice of God ("the Lord") was 'heard.' By corollary, we must also assume that the writer is aware of no voice of Jesus on earth, no historical ministry, for how could such a voice be completely ignored in chapter 12's peroration on the establishment of the New Covenant? How could the reader not be urged to heed the voice of Jesus as heard in his earthly life and career as a prophet?

The same idea is stated again in 13:7:

Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you...

Whether these leaders were those who were the first to hear it, or whether they received it from those who did, what was "spoken" is stated to have been the word of God, not the words of a preaching Jesus."

The voice of God presented in both the Old and the New Covenants is the voice of God in the writings, the latter being newly interpreted under perceived revelation. Once again, the progression is not scriptural history to present history, but scripture to scripture, from a voice heard at the Exodus to a voice heard from Heaven—both voices being that of God. If the idea of the voice of God "through the Son" (1:2) has any application here, it can only be that the spiritual Son is regarded as an intermediary channel, sometimes speaking in scripture in his own voice. In 12:18-19, the Son is not heard in any way; he stands only in the background. The quote from Haggai is attributed to God, serving to illustrate that the old is passing to make way for the new. The author had no words of Jesus on earth, authentic or otherwise, which could serve to illustrate this dramatic turning of the ages.

Yesterday, Today and Forever

This comment about Jesus in 13:8, that he is the same "yesterday and today and unto the ages" sums up the overall impression of this document. It is the very sense of the incarnation itself—a life on earth which would surely have compromised that comment—which is lacking in everything that the writer has said throughout his work. A scholar like Harold Attridge manages to unearth it from behind the heavenly presentations and alleged metaphors, but not a single verse in this document reasonably bears him out. R. McL. Wilson (*op.cit.*, p. 138) laments that the author "never explains in detail the relation between the Son, the earthly Jesus and the great high priest"; nevertheless, Wilson can declare "that for him they are one is clear enough." Discovering clarity in an author's mind becomes easier when one can manipulate the contents of that mind at will.

Wilson has also said that the writer makes no distinction between the earthly Jesus and the heavenly Jesus. Yet all we have gotten from him is the latter. How can we know that there exists in his mind the other dimension, the earthly Jesus from which he makes no distinction from the heavenly Jesus he *does* present? Can there be a distinction between two elements when one element is all that is in view? The answer is yes, when the missing element is arbitrarily inserted to make possible the alleged 'lack of distinction.'

Wilson concludes his observations with this admission:

[B]ut whether (the author) considered the earthly Jesus as in some sense divine, and if so how he thought of the relation between the divine and the human, is by no means clear. That was to be a problem for a later age.

And so it was—for the later age that invented an historical Jesus which the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews never knew. An age of illusion we are still living in.

The When of Christ's Sacrifice

In a number of passages in the epistles of the New Testament we have encountered the telling practice of focusing on the present time of revelation and apostolic preaching as the significant event in the new movement's genesis and development, to the exclusion of any recent life and work of Jesus of Nazareth. Throughout the epistles, that redeeming work of Jesus is never located in an identifiable time and place within history, but seems to hover in a vague and disembodied background, seen "through a glass darkly," to borrow Paul's memorable phrase (or rather, that of the King James rendering).

Instead, Jesus the Son is spoken of as having been "revealed" or as having "manifested himself" in the present time of the writers; he is a current force communicating with and residing within the hearts of believers, joined to them in mystical ways. His 'bodily' presence on earth is looked for in the immediate future, but no past presence in an historical incarnation seems anywhere in their thoughts, let alone in the picture they create of the rise and ongoing inspiration of their faith movement. Christ's great acts of death and resurrection are also missing from that picture; rather, they are part of what has been revealed, and they play a role only now in being drawn on by God, who himself has set in motion the imminent turning of the age and the promises it holds.

Yet even if the early writers seem unable to locate the time of the Son's acts historically, there are indicators in their writings of how they conceived the "when" of Jesus' sacrifice. Because of the supernatural nature of the process and its conception within a world of myth, there will inevitably be variation and inconsistency in the ways various writers and groups conceived and presented it, especially when working within an uncoordinated movement.

At the Completion of the Ages

We will first return to the Epistle to the Hebrews, to the passage in 9:24-26 in which it was demonstrated in the previous chapter that verse 26b,

...but now, once, at the completion of the ages, he has appeared [the verb *phaneroo*] to put away sin by his sacrifice,

is not a reference to Christ's appearance and incarnation on earth, but to his appearance in Heaven to perform the blood sacrifice in the heavenly sanctuary. It parallels the reference to his appearance before God in verse 24b:

he entered heaven itself, now to appear [the verb *emphanidzo*] in the presence of God on our behalf.

The two Greek verbs (in italics) in the above verses have similar meanings and applications, though not in all respects. Paul Ellingworth (*op.cit.*, p.480) has made the point that "There is no sharp distinction or contrast in Hebrews between *emphanidzo* and *phaneroo*" (noting both 9:8 and 9:26); this despite the general scholarly insistence on contravening this observation by having the former verb in 24b refer to Jesus' appearance in Heaven and the latter verb in 26b to Jesus' incarnation on earth.

But if 26b is another reference to Jesus' performance of his sacrifice in the heavenly sanctuary, this is said to be done "at the completion of the ages." Or is it? While it is possible that this writer conceived of—or at least presented—the sacrifice itself as locatable in the heavenly world at a time concurrent with the earthly time of 'these last days,' there are other ways to take this passage.

First, an ambiguity in the text must be taken into account. Literally, the verse says:

Now, at the completion of the ages, he has been revealed (or, he revealed/presented himself, appeared) to annul sin through his sacrifice.

If the verb in this sentence, *pephanerdtai* (from *phaneroo*), is taken as meaning "has presented himself," meaning "appeared," as was done in the last chapter, then this refers to the appearing of Christ in Heaven to perform his sacrifice. In that case, the author is envisioning this sacrifice as taking place "at the completion of the ages," and thus conceives of a temporal correspondence between events in Heaven and those on earth.

But the author has changed the verb in verse 26b from that in 24b, from *emphanidzo* to *phaneroo*. While there is a degree of commonality of meaning between the two, use of the latter verb in verse 26b has allowed the author to introduce, if he so wished, a different meaning—or perhaps a subtle combination of meanings. Both verbs can be used in the passive voice to mean 'to reveal oneself (literally, to be revealed by oneself): thus, 'to appear.' But the passive of *phaneroo* can also be used to mean 'to be revealed' in the sense of by an external agency. *Phaneroo* is used of Christ in Romans 16:26 in which the "mystery" of Paul's gospel of Jesus Christ has now been "revealed [*phanerdthentos*] through prophetic writings." Here it is those writings which have revealed Christ, not Christ revealing himself or 'appearing'.

It is true that translators of all those revelation verbs in the epistles describing Christ's 'advent' choose to take the meaning in the former sense, that Christ has revealed himself—in other words, he has appeared—rather than in the sense of being revealed by something external, such as scripture. It would be difficult to claim incarnation in the latter thought but easier to claim it in the former, although it would still be awkward and peculiar. Christ could "be revealed" *by God*—and the epistles do say so, as in Galatians 1:16, Romans 3:25 and 16:25—but this can reasonably be only in the sense of knowledge *about* him. To describe Jesus' incarnation as a 'revelation by God' would be an unusual, even bizarre way to put it and should thus be ruled out, especially since more natural and comprehensible ways to express the idea would have been readily available.

By using *phaneroo* in verse 26b, the author may have been availing himself of a verb which could also convey the idea that the appearing in Heaven to annul sin through his sacrifice (in the heavenly sanctuary) is something that has been revealed by an external agency—namely scripture, which has been the source of revelation for everything this writer has said throughout the epistle.

In that case, the verse offers another ambiguity. Strictly speaking, what has been done at the completion of the ages is the 'revealing' *in order to annul sin*. The "through his sacrifice" does not have to be tied temporally to the annulling as also happening in the present time. The sacrifice could have taken place at any previous time and simply be the pre-existing means (waiting in the wings) that is now drawn on by God to effect the annulling of sin. It is the annulling of sin which is the present-time event, the consequence of the revealing of Christ and his sacrifice. This would be in direct parallel to the Galatians 4 passage, in which what has happened in the present is God freeing believers from the Law at the time of Paul and the coming of faith, with God now drawing on the acts of Christ which could have taken place at any time in the past, or in another dimension.

We might thus nuance the verse by suggesting that it could be this revelation through scripture which the author has in mind as occurring at the completion of the ages. More than that, we cannot say. Nothing else in the epistle directs us to a time period in which Christ's sacrifice has taken place.

Christ Revealed

While the peculiar and exclusive use of revelation verbs to refer to Christ's manifestation in the present was touched on in chapter 3, this would be the occasion to take a closer look at this telling phenomenon in the epistles. Here are three of the major occurrences, as listed by Bauer's lexicon which describes the passive verb as referring to "his [Christ's] appearance in the world" rather than, as I suggest it should be, to "Christ's revelation *to* the world." Both options will be included in the translations:

1 Timothy 3:16 (christological hymn) - *hos ephanerothe en sarki*
who was revealed / appeared in flesh

1 Peter 1:20 - *proegnismenon men pro kataboles kosmou*
he was predestined from the foundation of the world,
phanerdthentos de ep' eschatou ton chronon di' humas
but was revealed / appeared in the last times because of you.

1 John 3:5 - *kai oidate oti ekeinos ephanerothe hina tas hamartis arei*
And you know that he [Christ] was revealed / appeared so that he might take away our sins.

These three have been chosen in order to illustrate that three pieces of writing coming from three different circles, none of whom show sign of direct contact with any of the others, have all used the same odd way (no matter in which translation option) to allegedly describe the incarnation. This would be difficult to fathom in the context of an historical Jesus. The point has been made before

that if an expression is out of the ordinary and apparently obscure, one might find a single source happening to use it as a reflection of its own idiosyncrasy; but to find an entire movement and multiple writers with no central organizing body of governance, doctrine or literature making exclusive use of that same idiosyncrasy tells us that something is wrong with our assumptions. If what is supposedly meant is that Jesus, a god, was incarnated to earth and lived a life in human flesh, why would not a single document ever put it in that clearer way?

And it is not only those three writers. To the above list we can also add Hebrews 9:26 which has just been examined, another example of a faith circle which shows little or no sign of contact with any of the others. We can also add other passages which use different words, all of them in the same family, all words of 'revealing.' In Romans 3:25, Paul speaks of God "setting forth" or "displaying" (the verb *protithemi*) Christ and his act of sacrifice. This verse, by the way, reflects another telling thought, identical to the one seen in Galatians. Why has God 'set forth' Christ at this time? "As a propitiation *through faith* in his blood." The propitiation (expiation of sin in the eyes of God) is not stated as gained through the act of sacrifice itself, the actual shedding of the blood, but by *faith* in it. Once again, Christ's sacrifice is a step removed, not specifically identified as taking place in the present time.

The Pastoral epistles (as in 2 Timothy 1:10) use the noun "*epiphaneia*," meaning an appearance or manifestation, as in our word "epiphany" for a moment of revelation. None of these words or usages in such texts conveys incarnation unless one reads such a thing into them.¹⁰⁰

This is particularly true when we consider usages of *phaneroo* for Christ in a different connection, again repeatedly. But this time it is not out of the ordinary. It perfectly fits what it describes: namely, the Parousia of Christ, the expectation of his coming, his "appearing" at the End-time. Just as it placed the above alleged references to the incarnation in their own category, Bauer's lexicon has made a separate classification for uses of the passive of *phaneroo* which are regarded as referring to "the Second Advent," to "Christ on his return," as in:

Colossians 3:4 - When Christ, who is our life, is revealed [*phanerothei*], you too will be revealed [*same verb*] in glory.

1 Peter 5:4 - When the Chief Shepherd appears [*phanerdthentos*], you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

1 John 2:28 - ...so that when he appears [*phanerothei*] we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming/presence.

Similar passages use the revelation noun *apokalupsis*:

2 Thessalonians 1:7 - (this will happen) at the revelation [*en te apokalupsei*] of our Lord Jesus Christ from heaven.

1 Peter 1:7 - (that your faith) may result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation [*en apokalupsei*] of Jesus Christ.

All of these passages fail to convey any earlier coming, or specify that it is a "return"—but that is a side issue at the moment. What needs to be seen is that

these passages are speaking of a single "appearance" of Christ at the End-time, a revelation of himself at a specific moment to the eyes of the world, which will immediately apprehend him. This is one of the principal meanings of the verb *phanerod*, the manifestation of a god or person on a specific occasion, as in "the god appeared to his devotees on the night of the mystery rite," or "the governor appeared in the city to collect the taxes," or "the king showed himself before his subjects." Thus we have a category of passages which speak of Christ's "appearance"—the 'revelation' of himself by himself—in a single-occasion sense, at the Parousia.

But this language is a poor fit when imposed on passages which are alleged to be speaking of incarnation, of a life which contained many acts and events. First of all, in the single-occasion sense, there is no other way to put it: it is an "appearing" by Christ at the moment of the Parousia. In the sense of incarnation, however, there would have been plainer and more natural ways to express it than to say "he revealed himself" in these last times—much less to say that he was revealed by God. It would be especially bizarre to say this to the *exclusion* of all other ways. Second, given the pervasive role of scripture and the Holy Spirit in everything that is declared about Christ, and the absence of any appeal to historical tradition, such passages should reasonably entail the idea that Christ has "been revealed" through these agencies, rather than that he revealed himself or "appeared." In view of the fact that no interest is shown in the life lived—and that any such life is always demonstrated through scripture (as in 1 Peter 2:22-23)—it is a dubious claim that in these particular passages the writer is interested in declaring the occasion of incarnation in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

As for a somewhat different implication in 1 John 3:5 and 8, the Johannine author wishes to make the point that Christ has taken away sin and destroyed the devil's work. To do this, he "was manifested" [*ephanerothe*], and thus the meaning might lean toward the active "appearing" sense rather than the passive "be revealed" sense. When or where this appearing took place, or in what state, we do not know, since the author never tells us. He does not even tell us that Jesus "laid down his life for us" (3:16) by means of crucifixion, for the cross does not appear in 1 John, nor does the resurrection. We cannot assume any of this lies in the background on the basis of the Johannine epistles being written later than the Gospel, since that position, though a common one in scholarship, is untenable. (To subscribe to it, one must get around many glaring anomalies. This issue is addressed in Appendix 5 [p.674].)

But it would be instructive to compare the use of *phanerod* in 1 John 3:5 and 8 with yet another use of it in chapter 1, in the 'prologue':

'What [*ho*] was from the beginning, what [*ho*] we have heard,
 what [*ho*] we have seen with our eyes,
 what [*ho*] we beheld and our hands touched, concerning the word of life,
²and the life was manifested/revealed [*ephanerothe*] to us, and we have seen
 and bear witness and announce to you the eternal life which was with the
 Father and was manifested/revealed [*ephanerothe*] to us...

Here the "what" being referred to is not Jesus, but the promise of eternal life. The relative pronouns [*ho*] are neuter, and taking the phrase "the word [*logos*] of life" as a reference to Jesus is fanciful. Yet scholars almost invariably insist on interpreting this passage as representing an eyewitness report of Jesus and his ministry. Rather, it is clear that it is "eternal life" itself that has been revealed, through an event of revelation which took place at "the beginning" of the sect's formation, which is what this passage is describing. (In this it is similar to Hebrews 2:3-4.) But if eternal life itself is said to be "revealed" along with the Son—to whom *God* "gives witness," not Jesus on earth giving witness to himself (see 5:9-11)—then we find ourselves in the same thought-world as the other epistles which speak of Jesus being "revealed" in the last times, not "appearing" on earth. Thus 3:5 and 8 ought to absorb some of that revelatory meaning. What has been revealed is not only the Son himself and the eternal life that proceeds from him—in the sense that he is an emanation of God and thus the life is "with God" (1:2)—but the specifics of the role he has played in God's bestowing of eternal life: taking away sin and destroying the devil's work by "laying down his life." It is all a mystical construct, arrived at through perceived revelation.

In the Biblical Time Line

Thus we have yet to see any passage in the epistles which clearly specifies an historical time in which Christ performed his redeeming acts. Is this because the writers have no clear conception of what "time" that was? I have made the point that the solution proposed by G. A. Wells, that Christ was conceived by them as having lived on earth at some unknown time in the past, does not work, since no placement of any sort *on earth* is in evidence, nor is the type of thinking and speculation about a life on earth we would expect as part of such a concept. Could early writers like Paul have envisioned the time and place of Jesus' death as purely Platonic, that is, taking place in Heaven in an essentially timeless dimension, so that it was not by nature locatable at a specific heavenly time corresponding to earthly chronology? This is difficult to resolve, but it may be that such thinking has been somewhat tempered by the Jewish biblical heritage. In other words, some epistle writers may envision Jesus' acts in the spiritual realm as occurring within a time frame which can be related to earthly history.

The pointers to those acts have been found in scripture, with scriptural passages at times presented as the voice of the Son himself. Jewish scripture, of course, possessed a strong historical orientation (unlike much of other oriental mythology). It was not only seen as the history of the Jewish people, it illuminated the unfolding salvation plan, the cooperation between God and the Jews, and now—for Paul—between God and the new gentile 'seed' of Abraham, the new children of the promise. It might be natural for early Christians like Paul to fall into a way of thinking of the spiritual Christ as operating, chronologically speaking, within that unfolding historical pattern. (The Ascension of Isaiah, if one can style this document 'Christian' at the stage before its obvious Christian insertions, prophesies the descent of the Son and his execution by Satan as

taking place in Isaiah's future.) So it is possible that early thinkers like Paul regarded the sacrifice of Christ in the spiritual world as falling within a time span corresponding to an historical period on earth, such as after Adam, or after Abraham, or even after Moses and the giving of the Law.

But is there any clear evidence of this in the epistles? We have seen two cases in the Pauline corpus (Galatians 4:4, Titus 1:3) in which the writers specify the time of Paul's preaching, the time when faith began, as the key moment—"the fullness of time" (*to pleroma tou chronou*) and "the proper time" (*kairois idiois*)—in the unfolding of God's new plan. Romans 3:25 does something of the same. But there is a passage in Romans in which a similar phrase is applied to Christ's death, and it might be said that this indicates that Paul at least envisions the death in something corresponding to historical time.

Dying for Sinners

Here is Romans 5:6-8, from *The Translator's New Testament*:

⁶While we were still weak, Christ died at the appointed time [*kata kairon*] for us godless men.

⁷To die for the sake of a just man would be difficult, though a man might dare to die for the sake of a good man.

⁸But God proves his love for us by the fact that while we were yet sinners Christ died for our sake.

Again we encounter some curiosities of expression. Paul refers to the time of Christ's death with a vague "at the appointed time." Why is he not more specific, especially if it was a recent event? The phrase poorly fits an historical orientation and knowledge, but fits well a context in which the time *cannot* be specified because it is not known, because it exists in another dimension. In verse 8, Paul has Christ's death proving *God's* love, which not only pushes Jesus once again into the shade, it fits other passages we have seen in which God is the principal if not the sole agency operating in the present period. It speaks to the haziness of Jesus as a recent personality which we find in all the early writers, his failure to emerge onto the stage in any flesh and blood historical way, let alone with specifics about his earthly incarnation.

But to turn to what Paul is saying in these verses. There are several variant word orders in the Greek manuscripts which subtly alter the sense (and may indicate that scribes were unsure of just what Paul meant). But the passage is regularly read as stating that the "when" of Christ's death was at a time when we were "weak" (verse 6) and "sinners" (verse 8). Such a temporal meaning, however, is not in view. Paul's point is not that *when/while* we were weak and sinners, Christ died for us; it is that *even though* we were weak and sinners, Christ died for us. This meaning is made clear by the intervening verse 7: that few if any of us would be willing to die for another person. This is the usual state of affairs, with which the act of Christ in the flanking verses is being contrasted as something unexpected: Christ was willing to die for us, even though we were weak and sinners. There need be no idea of "when" involved.

(Grammatically speaking, with a present participle adopting the time sense of the main verb "died," it is technically in the past, but this is obviously treated as a state continuing in the present. We could say, "Even though we *are* weak—as a general state of affairs, past and present—nonetheless Christ died for us.")

Furthermore, Paul would have had no interest in stating that Jesus had died *when* we were sinners. That would go without saying, for when would Christ have died for us otherwise? At the very least, in the context of a 'when' idea, humans would certainly have been sinners when Christ *did* die, since his purpose in dying was to rescue humanity from sin; thus the thought would be thoroughly redundant, even faintly illogical. We must conclude that any temporal meaning which may lurk within the language itself does not come into play here. Paul means: "Even though we were weak and sinners, nonetheless Christ was willing to die for us."

The key word in this passage, appearing in both verses 6 and 8, is "*eti*" (yet, still), and it occupies different positions depending on the manuscript. But while the word normally has a temporal application, Bauer's lexicon has a separate class of definition under "in a sense other than temporal," labelled "in logical inference." The best example of this (though not one of those offered by Bauer) is Romans 9:19:

You will say to me then, why does God still [*eti*] blame us?

Paul has just said, "God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden." The hypothetical question Paul then poses amounts to this: "Since God's will determines our sinfulness or lack of it, why should we be blamed for our actions, since who can resist God's will?" (A good question—for which, regrettably, Paul has no reasonable answer; it amounts to a stark statement of predestination no matter how modern scholarship seeks to rationalize it.) No sense of time belongs here. This is indeed a case of logical inference, which the 'nonetheless' structure entails. The meaning must be: "Since God's will determines our actions, should he still/nonetheless blame us?"

Thus in Romans 5:6-8 we can detect no particular point of contemporaneity between humans being sinners and Jesus dying to redeem that sinfulness. At best, Paul could have in mind that the sacrifice of Christ took place 'somewhen' within the Adam/Abraham/Moses to the present framework. No other reference can be found in the Pauline epistles to the idea that Christ died specifically within historical time. (There may, as we have seen, be such a thought in Hebrews 9:26, but keeping in mind that there was no coordination between the various circles of early Christ belief we cannot use one document to pronounce on another, and especially to declare an overall consistency and universality of concepts.) There are references to obtaining knowledge of Christ's acts and the newly-available benefits of those acts, together with Christ's new presence in spirit and mystical body within the faith community, all of which are located in historical time, namely in the present period of the writers. But so far, with the one possible exception, we have seen nothing which identifies a time within historical parameters for the acts themselves.

The Placement of Christ Chronologically

Before considering whether Christ himself and his redeeming actions may be positioned chronologically in a mythical context, we can first look at one passage in which it is claimed that his resurrection is placed in the recent past. In 1 Corinthians 15:20-23:

But the truth is, Christ was raised to life—the firstfruits of the harvest of the dead....As in Adam all men die, so in Christ all will be brought to life; but each in his own proper place: Christ the firstfruits, and afterwards, at his coming, those who belong to Christ. [NEB]

There is no reason to link Christ's own rising with the future rising of believers as two events close in time. Paul need not be implying that Christ's rising is a component of the End-time, something starting in the recent past and continuing into the imminent future of his Parousia. Besides, such a thought is notably missing in other Pauline expression, such as when he makes no reference to Jesus' life and acts in the progression from the present age—still waiting and woeful—to the future one (as in Romans 8:38).

In fact, we can point to this 1 Corinthians passage as yet another among many in which Christ is said to be coming (at his Parousia) only in the future. If Paul had just made a reference to an act of Christ in the recent past when he was here on earth—the trendsetter for human resurrection at his imminent Parousia—it would surely have been natural for him to refer to that expected event as in some way a return. We can also note again that in the hiatus in the quote above (verse 21), Paul does not say—despite an abundance of misleading translations—that Christ "brought" resurrection from the dead, as though by a recent historical act. No past tense verb is introduced, and verse 22, as we see, talks instead of the future coming.

Nor need the use of the term "firstfruits" in 15:20 and 23 imply that Christ's resurrection is the first of the End-time harvest and thus took place recently. Once again, the fact that these things have been *revealed* in the present may simply be leading Paul to treat them in terms of the present time. Since it is only now that people have learned about Christ's death and rising, the revelation and the effects it has produced become part of the present picture (just as Hebrews 9:26 finds itself implying that Christ's sacrifice in the heavenly sanctuary has taken place "at the completion of the ages").

Galatians 3:19 speaks of the Law being in effect "until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made," the singular "seed" being Christ as Paul has defined it in 3:16. But Christ is said to have "come" in many passages with a focus on the writer's present time, all of which can be seen to refer to the present revelation and the spirit of the Son now residing in the faith community, as in 1 John 5:20:

We know that the Son of God has come [lit., *is come*, in the present tense] and given us understanding.

Several passages, notably Romans 3:21-26, speak of this being the time God offers salvation through faith in his Son, but none of them specify that this faith has for its object a person or act which was located in the recent past, or indeed at any given time in history. In the opening verse of that passage (3:21), Paul declares that "now the justice of God has been manifested..." How? Not by Jesus himself and his acts, but "*witnessed by the law and the prophets.*" The latter implies, if not clearly states, that the source of knowledge about God's justice has been scripture itself—operating in the present time. Since God's justice involves the sacrifice of Christ, knowledge of this, too, must be located in scripture. Paul would hardly point to the witness of the prophets as the working phenomenon of the present and fail to mention the witness of an incarnated Jesus and the historical performance of that very sacrifice.

It could be maintained that because of the relationship between Christ's actions and the historical precedents which those actions have been designed to follow, correct or supplant, and because of the stated relationships between Christ and past figures in Jewish history, the early Christian mind must have envisioned the sacrifice as taking place within a time frame subsequent to those precedents—even if it were located in the supernatural world. If for Paul Christ is the second Adam, producing resurrection and the conquest of death to counteract the consequences of the first Adam's sin, did his redeeming acts not take place subsequent to that sin? If Christ has effected the demise of the Mosaic Law, did the act which accomplished this not take place subsequent to the enactment of that Law?

One might think so, and perhaps that was indeed the outlook. Yet nowhere (other than perhaps in Hebrews 9:26) is it actually presented in that timeline fashion. As we examine the texts, we have consistently found (even in Hebrews) that Jesus' act is a step removed; what happens 'subsequent' to the Jewish and scriptural precedents is always the *revelation* of the act, with God or the Holy Spirit performing the revelation. As for Christ's various relationships toward figures in Jewish history, these do not require that they began only *following* any of those figures. Determined by scripture, they are part of Jesus' inherent nature, and as such could be seen as present even within his state of existence prior to his redeeming acts, since the nature of the Son is regarded as eternal. Christ is the second or last Adam not because he *became* so following Adam, but because the point at which he fulfilled that role *came into operation* after Adam. As for being the "seed" of Abraham or David, it was demonstrated that the former is not presented in terms of historical, physical descent, but is determined by Paul's dubious exegesis of scripture (Gal. 3:16). In Romans 9:6-8, the gentiles are characterized as Abraham's "seed" in a non-physical way, opening wide the door for an understanding of Christ's relationship to Abraham and David in the same mystical fashion. Such a relationship involving an eternal Son need not have 'begun' at any specific point in time.

Be that as it may, our minds still feel the need to ask just when *did* the act of redemption itself take place? But is this a meaningful question? Did the Platonic

spiritual realm possess a chronology that could be seen to correspond to that of the material dimension?

Certain ancient and modern philosophers have had their doubts. We saw that Sallustius and Julian in the 4th century described the myth of a savior god like Attis as representing "timeless spiritual processes" which needed a story-myth as a substitute for something that was incomprehensible to the human mind. Plutarch in the 1st century seems to adopt a similar attitude. James Barr (*Biblical Words for Time*, p. 153) allows that God's eternal realities and institutions are usually expressed as being fundamentally different from those which inhabit normal time. A philosopher like Philo (echoed by J. D. Quinn in the *Anchor Bible Commentaries: Titus*, p.65) would say that God himself lives in a "timeless order."

Would Paul have followed suit, or was he less engaged with Platonic principles and could envision a heavenly world whose actions moved in step with earthly developments? Or did he have a Platonic outlook but not the language to properly express it, and simply fell into an implied temporal correspondence?

One complicating factor, which may or may not have entered Paul's mind, is that while Heaven and the realm of God could be seen as timeless and of a 'different order,' this should not have applied to the sphere below the moon which by definition was part of 'corruptibility' and thus would not be timeless. But we do not know exactly what Paul's cosmology was, how closely he adhered to Platonic principles (to whatever extent they might have approached standardization, especially in Jewish circles). We do not know what 'rules' he envisioned for the sphere of heaven, whether above or below the moon, in which he believed Christ had died. Because Christ's death was at the hands of the demons, it was a spiritual event even if it were below the moon; if it thus emerged into a sphere of time, there may still have been no way to identify it historically—if Paul was even concerned with such niceties. His 'world of myth' may not have presented considerations of that nature, or he may have had his own way of resolving them. When minds under imagined inspiration are working with fantastic concepts that lack any relation to reality, with no rational objective standards brought to them, anything is possible.

In an attempt to throw light on these questions, we will examine a passage in 2 Timothy.

Bringing Eternal Life to Light

The Pastoral epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) are almost universally regarded by critical scholars as products of the first half of the 2nd century. They are in the line of the Pauline 'school' which some time after Paul's death had produced earlier letters in his name: Colossians, Ephesians and 2 Thessalonians. Many ideas and modes of expression which go back to Paul himself can be found in them, though at times having passed through some evolution. 2 Timothy 1:9-10 reads (mostly based on the NEB):

...that comes from God [*theou*], ⁹It is he [God] **who** brought us salvation and called us to a dedicated life, not from any merit of ours but of his own purpose and his own grace, which was granted to us in Christ Jesus from all eternity [*pro chronon aionion*, lit., before times eternal] ¹⁰but has now at length been brought fully into view by the appearance of our Savior Christ Jesus [lit., "has been manifested (using the 'revelation' verb *phaneroo*) by the appearance (using the noun *epiphaneia*) of our Savior Christ Jesus], **who** has broken the power of death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. [The following verse 11 makes clear that this is the gospel preached by Paul.]

First, it was necessary to delete the gratuitous "on earth" which the NEB supplies after "by the appearance"; there is no such wording in the Greek. (One must be wary of translators who do their work wearing Gospel-colored glasses.)

Then note the phrase (verse 10) "...brought fully into view by the appearance of..." This is actually two revelation words, the verb *phaneroo* and the noun *epiphaneia*. Since the standard definition of the latter does not involve incarnation, but only a one-occasion appearance, in this case of a god, we thus arrive at the thought of this sentence as: 'God's purpose and grace, granted to us in Christ Jesus before times eternal, has now been manifested/revealed through the appearance/manifestation (in the sense of revealing) of the Savior, in the gospel preached by Paul.' In other words, we have a double revelation statement: 'God's purpose and grace have been revealed by the revelation of the Savior.'

How is what follows to be interpreted? Unfortunately, the passage involves a significant grammatical ambiguity. In the statement in verse 10,

who has broken the power of death and brought life and immortality to light...

does this second "**who**" (contained in *katargesantos*, in the genitive) refer back to the immediately preceding Christ Jesus, *Xristou Iesou* in the genitive? (That's generally the way translations present it.) Or does it go all the way back to the end of verse 8 (it's one big happy sentence in the Greek from 8 to 11), with its *theou* (God) in the genitive? Verse 9 is itself a long genitive clause beginning with a first "**who**" modifying *theou*, with the first part of verse 10 an accusative clause modifying God's "purpose and grace" in verse 9; so the following 'broken the power of death' could be a second plank in the structure going back to God, even though grammatically speaking it ambiguously could modify the closer "Christ Jesus" as well. In other words, the two **who**'s would be in parallel.

There is good reason to take the second "**who**" as meant to modify "God," not Jesus. This abrogating of death and bringing immortality to light is "through the gospel"—Paul's gospel, as verse 11 makes clear ("for which I was appointed herald, apostle and teacher"). Would Jesus be thought of as doing these things *through Paul's gospel*? A strange concept. We would expect the statement that Christ at his 'appearance' had overcome death and brought life and immortality to light *through his own deeds*, performed during his life on earth. As it is, with

an understanding of *God* doing the abrogating of death and bringing to light life and immortality, we once again have an exact correspondence with a passage like Galatians 4, which has God doing the purchasing of freedom from the Law *through Paul*. The same thought would make sense here. In fact, as we have seen throughout the epistles, this is the exclusive thought: that God is the one acting in the present period. Once more, here in 2 Timothy Jesus remains in the background, simply being revealed in the present time and having the effects of his mythical acts applied by God, working through the likes of Paul.

What we have in this passage is another prime example of how the epistles describe a present time in which what has happened is not the saving act itself, but the bringing of that act and its benefits to the light of human knowledge, through the preaching of the gospel engaged in by such as Paul. Such a meaning is particularly evident in this passage by the writer's phrase "brought life and immortality *to light*." This language literally defines the early period of the faith as a time of revelation, something we have seen entirely associated with God, not one beginning with the presence and deeds of Jesus on earth. If the latter had been the case, we would hardly encounter this exclusive styling of Christianity's genesis as the time and product of revelation, the work of God and the Holy Spirit, with information coming from scripture. The whole of the above passage is introduced (v. 9a) by the idea that "it is (God) who has brought us salvation." This manner of speaking should have been impossible to any writer who possessed the image of Jesus coming to earth in the recent past to do just that.

Before Time Began

But might this passage tell us something else?

Let's look at verse 9's "*which was granted to us in Christ Jesus from all eternity*." Or, with the last phrase in a more literal rendering of the Greek *pro chronon aidnion*, "before times eternal." This phrase has been much analyzed. It clearly refers to some past time or state, and may be related to the idea found elsewhere of God's "secret" being hidden for long ages, an allusion to the mystery which the Pauline writers regularly refer to. Through the proclamation of men like Paul, the veil over God's salvation accomplished through the Son is being pulled aside.

We will first focus on the "*pro chronon aidnion*."

The NEB translation, "from all eternity," is not literal and not particularly revealing. The NASB uses the same words, and the RSV's "ages ago" is woolly and noncommittal. The NIV gets closer: "before the beginning of time," since literally the Greek words (in order) are "before times eternal." A slightly different connotation is conveyed by the NAB and the venerable King James Version, with their "before the world began." But it would be better to keep some reference to the concept of time, and so the *Translator's New Testament* is preferable with its "before time began."

If the commentators are in agreement, it is that no one is really sure what the writer means by this phrase. *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*

(I, 198-209; IX, 592) wonders if it "can ever be answered with any certainty." If the preposition is dropped, most scholars agree that "eternal times" refers to the full expanse of time which the world has passed through from creation to the present. While this is inconsistent with the modern meaning of the word "eternal," such a meaning is required by its use in Romans 16:25, that God's mystery about Christ has been kept silent "in times eternal." This must mean for as long as the world has existed.

Attaching the preposition "*pro*" lifts the meaning to a place which lies before or outside this span of total time through which the world has passed. Wherever that lies, it is essentially timeless, or at least it is time of a fundamentally different order. More than one commentator has noted that the adjective *aidnios* by itself (i.e., when not attached to *chronos*), can refer, to a quality of being "eternal" which transcends time. The word is almost exclusively used in the New Testament of things relating to God. As such, it conforms to Platonic thought current at the time the epistles were written.

In this particular case, what is this thing relating to God which he did *pro chronon aionion*, before the creation of the world, before or outside time itself? The usual interpretation, and it may be correct, is that it refers to God's intention or promise to take action involving Christ. Other epistles have referred to long-hidden secrets and promises made by God in the distant past. However, here the writer says that God has saved us

...according to his own purpose and grace, given [*dotheisan*] to us in Christ Jesus before times eternal...

It may seem odd to speak of a purpose, or grace, that is "given" to us through the agency of Christ Jesus at a point before the creation of the world or the beginning of time. It is also odd to bring in Jesus as an agent of that grace in relation to God's pre-time intention, rather than to the historical point at which his agency was realized—on Calvary in the recent past. On the other hand, by now we have become accustomed to the strange way (from an historicist point of view) the epistles have of presenting things.

Despite the oddity of the language here, the writer's intended meaning may be revealed by a similar passage in Titus 1:2, an epistle usually thought to be by the same author:

...in the hope of eternal life which God, who does not lie, promised before times eternal [*pro chronon aionion*]...

Here it is clearly the *promises* that are made *pro chronon aionion*,¹⁰¹ But I will remind the reader of a previous observation that this verse is followed by the statement that the earliest action on God's promises is not specified as the acts of Jesus himself, or his appearance on earth less than a century before the writer's time, but rather that God "brought his word to light [in the apt translation of the NIV] through the preaching entrusted to me [i.e., Paul] by the command of God our Savior." Once again, Jesus and his acts have been left in a murky limbo, never emerging into the "light" of historical time. As I have maintained before,

the writer's silence on any earlier action on God's promises in the person of Jesus of Nazareth effectively excludes him from the picture.

A similar pattern is found in another pseudo-Pauline epistle. Ephesians 3:9-11 says that the mystery hidden for ages in God has now

been made known through the church...according to his eternal purpose [lit., purpose of the ages, *prothesin ton aidnion*], which he formulated in Christ Jesus.

Again, the present is a time of revelation through apostles like Paul (the "church"), the long-hidden mystery being disclosed not by Jesus but by the faith movement in the time of Paul. And once again, Christ is being associated not with the present but with the past-formed purpose of God.

Nor can it be claimed that "the mystery hidden for ages in God" refers only to his intentions or promises, or the way in which they would be disclosed and fulfilled, leaving Jesus' life intact even if not mentioned. For that disclosure and fulfillment would inevitably have been focused on Jesus himself, his own teachings and acts in recent history. 'Paul' in this passage has gone so far as to say (3:8) that

To me was given this grace...to bring to light the administration of this mystery, which for ages has been hidden in God...

Once more has Paul (in this case, someone speaking on behalf of Paul, but taking his cue from the apostle himself) claimed the central role—the first and exclusive role—in revealing the mystery long hidden by God. One wonders that he did not feel Jesus' breath over his shoulder, reminding him of the little part he the Son had recently had to play in bringing the mystery of himself to light.

Fitting Christ into Earthly Chronology

The point to be made here concerns the placement of Jesus' heavenly death in relation to the chronology of earthly events. It is clear that these writers have no concept of Jesus acting in historical time on earth; no such specification is ever made, and it is too often conspicuous by its absence as a necessary part of the scheme of things. But nowhere, as well, is Christ's act located subsequent to the historical situation it supplants. The "when" of Christ's sacrifice is so undefined, so obscure, that no epistle writer goes out on a limb to try to specify its correspondence to earthly history. That the act comes after Adam, or Abraham, or Moses, might seem necessary by logical inference, but consider this. If God, according to a passage like 2 Timothy 1:9 or Titus 1:2 or Ephesians 3:10, can have God acting to formulate a purpose or make a promise even before the present age of the world—before the moment at which the Fall, or the Abrahamic Promise, or the Mosaic Law, even occurred and created the need for such a divine initiative to correct the situation—there should be no reason why the act itself by Christ could not similarly have been performed before the event it was designed for. Christ himself in so many of those passages seems to be enlisted at the *time* of the promise: "*in Christ Jesus.*" This is why we cannot

completely rule out the possibility that a passage like 2 Timothy 1:9-10 has in mind the actual performance of Christ's sacrifice at a point "before (earthly) time began."

This is not to say that every Christian mind and writer would have thought of it or styled it this way. Or that those who did, or presented it as they have, would necessarily have subjected it to logical analysis in order to understand it. What we *can* say is that none of them present us with an historical crucifixion at any moment of historical time.

Though all of this language may seem maddeningly obscure—and should alert us to the fact that we are dealing with ideas alien to us today—it should be clear that the performance of the act of Christ lies in an unknown and indefinable past lying outside the confines of the material dimension. It has remained unknown throughout the whole of history and is only now being disclosed to the world. Humans have learned about it through God's revelation, a revelation imparted through the sacred writings and what was now being read into them.

This may not be something we in later ages can readily relate to. But to delve into some of the philosophical thinking of the period is also an alien experience (one usually indulged in only by esoteric academia) and there is no good reason to claim that Christian thinking, especially by a mind of the caliber of Paul's, did not share in it. In fact, the Gospels might be regarded as a reaction against this type of thinking, literally the bringing down to earth of an outlook that the uneducated, broader masses could not so easily comprehend or respond to.

When any set of assumptions is firmly in place, the evidence is inevitably interpreted in accordance with those assumptions. Yet it is clear that the New Testament epistles present the reader and scholar with difficulties and anomalies at every turn. These have traditionally been ignored, glossed over, or subjected to unnatural interpretations and questionable reasoning in order to force them into the mold determined by the Gospels.

What is needed is a new paradigm, a new set of assumptions by which to judge the epistles (as well as other non-canonical documents), one capable of resolving all those contradictions and uncertainties. Such a paradigm should be determined by what we can see in the documents themselves and how their content can be related to what we know of the spirit and conceptions of the time. When the paradigm and interpretations based upon it are revolutionary, at least by the standards of the old one, incredulity is to be expected. But dramatic reversal, even on the order of something like the Copernican revolution in astronomy, is not at all rare in the field of science and historical research. Dogma and received wisdom are regularly overturned in many areas. The investigation of Christian origins as an historical phenomenon enjoys no privileged exemption from such a fate. If the elements of early Christianity as reflected in the epistles point to a faith movement which was based on an entirely spiritual deity, and this picture fits well into the known religious thought of the time, then that is the path of investigation to follow.

Part Six

A RIOTOUS DIVERSITY

18

The Birth of a Movement

Springing Fully Grown

Of all the puzzles in the New Testament record which scholarship has been forced to address, perhaps none has provoked a greater scramble for explanation than the amazing diversity of views about Jesus to be found in the surviving documents of the first hundred years. A survey of the record reveals notable differences in theology, ritual and expectation, between one writer and another, one Christian community and another. Within that diversity lies the key to understanding the true origins of Christianity.

Just as scholars such as Ridderbos have expressed astonishment at Jesus' presumed elevation to cosmic heights immediately after his death, many have also remarked on the seemingly rapid spread of the movement and the great multiplicity of forms it took in different centers. Of this, Wayne Meeks says (*The First Urban Christians*, p.5):

Christianity, even at the earliest moment we can get any clear picture of it, was already a complex movement taking form within several complex societies.

Ron Cameron ("The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Origins," in *The Future of Early Christianity*, p.381) summarizes Walter Bauer's thesis in the latter's now-classic *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* this way:

The beginnings of Christianity were exceptionally diverse, varied dramatically from region to region, and were dominated by individuals and groups whose practices and theology would be denounced as 'heretical'.

This diversity has traditionally been characterized by scholars as different "responses" to the man Jesus of Nazareth, responses which at the same time managed to ignore most or all of the others and went off on distinct tangents. Even within the Gospels themselves, scholars have recognized that different elements seem to have an independent character of their own, containing little or no reflection of other elements.

Thus, Burton Mack, in his *Who Wrote the New Testament?*, sees such things as representing "components" of Jesus' career which were separately preserved by groups of followers and believers who formed in various places in response to him. Each group focused on a specific aspect of that career: teachings of one sort, teachings of another sort, miracle traditions, apocalyptic expectations, and the most dramatic response of all, the message that he had brought salvation through his death on the cross and resurrection from the grave. Each of these groups supposedly produced and preserved their own specific records: miracle collections, prophetic sayings, a passion account, etc., and these later became available to the various evangelists.

This type of theory extrapolates backwards. It starts from the Gospels and assumes that the different strands within them can be traced back to a common source. But no concrete evidence exists for this postulated break-up of Jesus into his component parts, for this initial divergence of response to Jesus, followed decades later by a reverse convergence of those separated parts into the Gospels.

Rather, the separate strands which were later brought together to form the "Jesus tradition" of the Gospels are best seen as diverse expressions within the broader social and religious milieu of the time, having nothing to do in their earliest stages with an historical Jesus, in some cases not even with a spiritual Jesus. Collections of wisdom teaching, aretalogies (lists of exploits and miracles attributed to famous men, or even to sectarian groups and their prophets), anonymous apocalypses, traditions of conflict with the establishment in the demand for reforms to social and religious practice: such things were the antecedents to the various Jesus strands and only at later stages did they become associated with such a figure, ultimately to end up in a composite Gospel. Some would have been linked to a Jesus only at the time of Gospel composition.

Add to this the wider record of contrasting and often incompatible views about the cultic Jesus, the different concepts of a divine figure in Paul, in Hebrews and other epistles, in secondary documents like the Odes of Solomon and the Shepherd of Hermas, none of which are associated with an historical Jesus of Nazareth, and we have a compelling picture of diversity which begs to be seen as having *begun* as diversity, not from some common starting point which immediately splintered in all directions.

Twin Traditions

One of the more recent scholarly tendencies (as in John Dominic Crossan's 1998 *The Birth of Christianity*) has been to collapse the Gospel diversity into a fundamental division between two distinct responses to Jesus, namely the Galilean and Jerusalem Traditions surveyed in this book. Yet even this simpler scenario fails to solve the basic problem. Once again, we are presented with multiple responses to Jesus which are separated by a wide gulf. The Galilean response preserves all the elements of a preaching ministry, even if presumed to have enlarged on them and added things which Jesus had not actually said and done. This Tradition does not view him as the Messiah and shows no knowledge

of the essential features of the other Tradition. That other, Jerusalem response shows no knowledge of the Galilean career and turns Jesus into a spiritual divinity and sacrificial savior figure in Heaven, a part of God who closely resembles philosophical and religious expressions of the day.

But how did one man, operating in two different centers less than a hundred miles apart, give rise to two such divergent and incompatible responses? How did they flourish for so long in isolation from one another? Can we in fact reliably assign an historical Jesus even to the roots of the Galilean Tradition?

Even within the Jerusalem Tradition, within the Christ cult itself, there existed a widely diverse set of expressions, varied interpretations of a divine Son and what he had done, what he represented, what he offered. If the Christ cult began in Jerusalem as a response to the events of Jesus' death and perceived resurrection, giving rise to a missionary movement which spread outward from that place, how did such dramatic diversity develop, some of it very quickly? A survey of that diversity will lead to certain conclusions about the origins of Christianity that have already been intimated in previous chapters.

Hebrews in Egypt

Within the New Testament itself, we have examples of divergent variety. The picture of Christ in the Epistle to the Hebrews, as we have seen in chapter 16, is unlike any other. Scholars have often asked themselves what led its writer to think of portraying Jesus in this manner, why this particular group of Christian converts deviated so radically from what must have been the more standard Christian message about Jesus, the theological and historical picture they would have received through the apostolic channels by which they were converted.

But in the epistle itself, no sign of such a deviation can be detected. The writer and his community seem to move in their own world, a world exclusively dependent on scripture and its interpretation. The epistle is what it is because certain sectarian minds formulated their own picture of spiritual realities. They searched scripture for information and insight about the Son of God, influenced by the wider religious and philosophical atmosphere of the 1st century—especially the Platonism of Egyptian Alexandria—and this is what they came up with. As we have seen, their mediator between heaven and earth has been cast in the mold of the sacrificial cult of Sinai, as presented in the biblical book of Exodus. But this is not the reinterpretation of an apostolic message, an against-the-grain twist to the story of some recent man. No bow is made in the epistle to any wider Christian movement nor to any standard from which they are deviating. Hebrews and its community are self-sufficient, imagining they have undergone a revelatory experience. It too, like all the other expressions of Christ belief of the day, from Paul to the Johannine epistles, professes its dependence upon, and defines its origins in, divine revelation and the sacred writings.

While the Epistle to the Hebrews may not have been written in Alexandria itself, a set of "Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers" found now in the Apostolic Constitutions of the 4th century are regarded as having been a product of that

city, derived from earlier, originally Jewish circles of a period closer to Philo (early 1st century). While clearly Christian insertions can be identified, there are also telltale marks of more subtle, previous stages of evolution.

Alongside, for example, a type of insertion which names Christ and Jesus, stand references to God's "Word" or Logos, both types filling a similar role. For example, the original prayers (as in VIII, 12, v.7) praise God for begetting

thy only Son, God the Logos, the living Sophia, the first-born of every creature, the angel of Thy great counsel and Thy High-Priest, but the King and Lord of every intellectual and sensible nature, who was before all things, by whom were all things.

These, having points of contact with Paul and Hebrews, seem part of an earlier, perhaps original layer, the product of Hellenistic-Jewish circles who saw, as in Philo, the Wisdom of Solomon and Jewish personified Wisdom generally, creation taking place through a heavenly being who was an emanation of God; no identification with an historical man is in evidence. Whereas another passage in a different prayer (VII, 36, v.1) has brought this idea to the next, more specifically Christ-cult stage: "O Lord...you created the cosmos through Christ." Christ even at this stage may still be a heavenly figure, and such sentiments resemble those of the New Testament christological hymns such as Colossians 1:15-20 and 1 Corinthians 8:6. From the earlier stage of Logos and Wisdom, the 'Son' has progressed to the names "Christ" and "Jesus" and later to the Gospel mythology as new developments about the intermediary Son were overlaid on the earlier liturgy. Succeeding layers exist side by side in these prayers, as the community evolved its ideas and made successive insertions and amendments.

The Son in the Shepherd of Hermas

Another heavenly Son is found in the longest surviving Christian document before Justin, the *Shepherd of Hermas*. Though identified with the brother of Pius, bishop of Rome around 148 CE, this document is generally regarded as written before that time, probably in the late 1st century, which would fit its primitive theology and predominantly Jewish character.

The work is a series of revelations to Hermas by angelic and other celestial figures. One of these is "the shepherd," angel of repentance, which gives the writing its name. The book is divided into three divisions: 5 Visions, 12 Commandments, and 10 Parables. The genre is apocalyptic. The author's central concern is the question of sin after baptism: is forgiveness available to Christians for sins committed following their conversion? Hermas argues that repentance is still possible—though only once.

For all its length, the names of Jesus and Christ are never used. (The sole appearance of "Christ" in one manuscript is thought to be an emendation of "Lord," meaning God, which appears in other manuscripts.) The writer refers to a "Son of God" who is a highly mystical figure devoid of human features. Sometimes the Son is equated with the Holy Spirit or the Jewish Law. There is no sense of a Son with a distinct personality, biography or role separate from

longstanding ways of thinking about God's dealings with the world. He is part of the paraphernalia of Heaven, the way Wisdom is portrayed in broader circles of Jewish expression. He is older than all creation, the Father's counselor (Parable 9, 12:1). He "supports the whole world" (14:5). Parable 9 tells of the building of a heavenly tower representing the church. The Son is the foundation rock and the gate; one cannot enter this tower, this Kingdom of God, except through his Son. All this is a reflection of that underlying concept encountered at every turn throughout the early Christian period: that God is known and accessible only through his emanations, through the intermediary Son. Salvation comes to those who are "called through his Son" (Parable 8, 11:1). Of a death and resurrection there is not a whisper in the entire document.

Hermas treats the "church," the body of believers, as a mystical entity. It is God himself who has created the church (Vision 1, 1:6), including its pre-existent prototype in heaven. There is constant reference to the "elect of God," with no tradition about a church established by Jesus. Nothing which could fit the Gospel ministry is referred to. The writer can speak of "apostles" but never associate them with an historical figure who appointed them; there is no tradition of anything going back to such a figure. Instead, "apostles and teachers preach the name of the Son of God" (Parable 9, 16:5), in the same way that Paul and other Christian prophets preach the divine Christ.

The central section of the Shepherd discusses a great list of moral rules, some resembling the teachings of the Gospels, but no attribution is made to Jesus. A passage in the Fifth Parable (6:3) has the Son "cleansing the sins of the people," but this *precedes* his "showing them the ways of life and giving them the Law," and the former is never presented in terms of sacrifice or atonement. The 'giving of the Law' is through spiritual channels, for a later Parable states that the angel Michael (who in Parable 9 is yet another figure equated with the Son of God) has "put the Law into the hearts of those who believe." There is no preaching by an historical Son in evidence anywhere in this work.

In the same Fifth Parable, scholars think to find a reference to incarnation (verses 5-7) by making a link between the Son and "the Holy Spirit (which) God made to dwell in the flesh which he willed." But this link is not an obvious one, and in fact the text shows that the "flesh" in which the Spirit was sent to dwell does not refer to the Son, but to believers, who do not defile the Spirit while it dwells in them; that "flesh" is given a reward in heaven ("all flesh in which the Holy Spirit has dwelt shall receive a reward if it be found undefiled and spotless"), which is hardly a reference to the Son himself.¹⁰²

This writer is rooted in Hellenistic-Jewish mythology with its picture of a heaven in which different forces form part of the workings of divinity. The Son is one of many figures in a class photo which includes the Holy Spirit and angels of several ranks, and these are occasionally allowed to merge into one another. As Charles Talbert puts it (*op.cit.*, p.432), "the Savior is described basically in terms of an angelology which has coalesced with the categories of Son and Spirit." The word "category" is apt, for Hermas is dealing with philosophical

concepts here, not an historical figure who was God's incarnation. Had he possessed any idea of the Son as a human personality who had walked the earth in recent memory, suffered and died and resurrected outside Jerusalem to redeem humanity, he could never have buried him in this densely obscure heavenly construct and allowed the entire picture 'recorded' in the Gospels to evaporate into the mystical wind.

A Pierced Messiah

Not all Sons were sacrificed, though virtually all those in the New Testament were. The one possible exception is the epistle of James, whose brief reference to Jesus Christ (2:1) makes no mention of it. In fact, it was noted earlier that in this epistle salvation is said to be achieved by "accepting the message implanted in you" (1:21), not by believing in a death and resurrection or atoning sacrifice.

But a clearly sacrificed Son is found in the Book of Revelation, the "Lamb who was slain." He is said to have been "dead and came to life again" (2:8), but no earthly setting or circumstances are offered; no idea of a bodily resurrection is introduced. He is equated with the Danielic Son of Man in a way which indicates that the writer is drawing from the Old Testament Book of Daniel itself, not from any Gospel traditions about Jesus being associated with that figure.

Revelation's heavenly Christ is a redemptive paradigm. He has undergone a sacrificial death which guarantees salvation, but this is not in a universal sense. The group who will be saved by the Lamb is an elect, while the rest of the earth has been consigned to a horrible judgment and calamitous fate. This salvation of an elect group through the actions of a counterpart heavenly figure may well represent the earliest expression of the higher-lower worlds paradigm principle. It lacks any of the Pauline concept of universality and is another example within the New Testament itself of notably differing ways of viewing the spiritual Christ and his role.¹⁰³

Revelation opens, quite fittingly, with the announcement of a revelation:

This is the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him to show his servants what must soon take place, and he [i.e., Christ] sent it through his angel to his servant John who, telling everything he saw, has borne witness to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. [1:1-2]

God makes a revelation to Jesus, who in turn communicates it through an angel to the prophet John. (No phase involving an earthly Jesus is in evidence, indeed it is excluded.) John, in setting it all down in writing, bears witness to God's revelation and to the Jesus Christ transmitting it from him. The latter figure communicates entirely through spiritual channels, and with the exception of 3:3 (unattributed) nothing he says bears any resemblance to the words of Jesus as spoken in the Gospels. For the author, Christ is an entirely heavenly figure, a spiritual intermediary between God and the world.

Christ and the features that have been given to him are a product of the study of scripture, not a record of history. Revelation 1:7 is an adaptation of Zechariah 12:10, prefaced by a commonly used motif from Daniel 7:13:

Behold, he is coming with the clouds! Every eye shall see him, and among them those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the world shall lament in remorse.

Critical scholars are largely agreed (see the discussion in the Anchor Bible, *Zechariah*, p.336-342, and *Harper's Bible Commentary*, p.751) that the original passage in Zechariah alluded to something now lost to us, in that the Davidic rulers in Jerusalem on the Day of the Lord ("that day") will feel pity for someone they have previously persecuted and "pierced," probably a prophet, someone whom they shall grieve over "as for a first-born son." But to a later age reading it (they too would have lost sight of the original allusion), this passage would have suggested some pregnant ideas. The Hebrew actually has "they shall look on *me* whom they have pierced," which later Greek translations 'corrected' to "on him," to bring it into line with the pronouns "him" in the rest of the verse. Thus, who was the prophet referring to but a heavenly figure—in fact, a "Son" of God, since the final phrase of the verse uses this very simile, "first-born son." Zechariah 12:10 could well have been the principal source of Revelation's idea of the Christ who was pierced, the Lamb who was slain.

Indeed, passages such as this were probably the source of the concept in early cultic Christianity that the spiritual Christ had been crucified. Isaiah 53:5, interpreted messianically, said that "he was pierced for our transgressions, tortured for our iniquities"; 53:7 told of the "sheep that was led to the slaughter." The sacrificial lamb was a symbol deeply imbedded in Jewish tradition, going back through countless Passovers to the Exodus legend, formerly based on archaic rites of animal sacrifice. As for the conquering Lamb, this too is a motif to be found in Jewish apocalyptic, as reflected in the Testament of Joseph (19:8), part of the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs (*Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol.1, p.824).

Crucifixion in a Great City

It is often claimed that Revelation contains one reference to a circumstance of Jesus' historical life. In 11:1-13 the author incorporates what are probably two earlier Jewish oracles originally spoken during the tribulations of the Jewish War. The first relates to the Temple and the abandonment of its outer court to the invading gentile. In the second, two prophets shall prophecy in the Holy City and then be slain....

Their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is allegorically called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified. (11:8, RSV)

Is the writer using these oracles literally, or as a symbolic representation (in a piece of writing saturated with symbolism) of the people of God being rejected and attacked by the godless world? As for the "great city," many commentators regard this as symbolic, and not a literal reference to Jerusalem. For example, John Sweet (*Revelation*, p. 187) suggests that it represents the social and political embodiment of rebellion against God; "its present location is Rome." P. E.

Hughes (*Revelation: A Commentary*, p. 127) takes it as denoting "the worldwide structure of unbelief and defiance against God." G. A. Kroedel (*Augsberg Commentary on Revelation*, p. 226), while regarding the city on one level as Jerusalem, sees it "not as a geographical location but a symbolic place," representing the immoral, idolatrous, oppressive world. It is, then, a symbol of the corruption personified by great cities in general, the godless world "where their Lord was crucified." This says no more than that the sacrifice of Christ was the responsibility of the forces of evil and those who reject the gospel.

We might also note that the clause "where their Lord was crucified" could be taken as tied primarily to the "allegorically called Sodom and Egypt" (the Greek phrase is literally "spiritually called"), and would thus be a step removed from any literal material "city," even were the latter to be understood as Jerusalem.

O. S. Wintermute, in a study of the Apocalypse of Elijah (*Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol.1, p.748, note 'w'), observes that the term "great city" is frequently a pejorative expression, and was most often applied to the metropolis of a detested enemy. Comparing Revelation, he admits that its author always uses the term to refer to Rome. However, he insists that the one exception is here in 11:8, "where it is used to describe the city in which the Lord was crucified," an example of the practice of denying acknowledged evidence on the basis of preconception.

As for the reference to the "twelve apostles of the Lamb" whose names are inscribed on the twelve foundation stones of the New Jerusalem (21:14), this is a mystic number and not identified with any historical figures. This is indicated by the context: the heavenly Jerusalem possesses twelve gates bearing the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, and a city wall with twelve foundation stones; upon these stones are inscribed "the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." (Such "apostles" could have been envisioned as being of the type of John himself, namely prophets of the spiritual Christ.). Such symbolic thinking could have created the tradition that Jesus had twelve disciples during an earthly ministry.

A Mystic Messiah

A century ago, a lost document came to light which reveals yet another community which had a divine Son only distantly related to that of either Paul or the Synoptics. This is the fascinating set of 42 little hymns, very like the Old Testament Psalms in character, though brighter, more lyrical and optimistic in tone, known as the Odes of Solomon. They were written, probably in the latter part of the 1st century, in the language of Syriac, which places them somewhere in Syria, perhaps in the region of Edessa. Their quiet ecstasy is the voice of the mystic, though it is impossible to say if the same person wrote them all.

The one New Testament document they resemble is the Gospel of John—though not its figure of Jesus of Nazareth which the Odes do not contain. The figure of the "Word" which permeates the Odes appears in the Gospel Prologue, though the latter is in a more advanced form, since the Odists never styles the Word as incarnated. The phrase "living water" flows repeatedly through the

Odes to represent the gift of divine revelation and knowledge of God, but unlike John, it lacks a human personification. Images of light, rest, the door of salvation are common between the Odes and the Johannine writings. Perhaps both strands grew out of a common source.

The Odes never speak the name "Jesus," and the title "Messiah" which appears seven times has a definite Jewish flavor. Not a single Gospel detail is evident anywhere in these Odes. Despite the best efforts of some commentators, there is no reference to either the crucifixion or the resurrection, and the Son's role in salvation is not a sacrificial one. Consequently, there is no Atonement, no paradigmatic guarantee. Instead, salvation comes through knowledge of God, the revelation of his grace and truth, and belief in that revelation.

Notwithstanding, the Odes of Solomon have been declared "Christian" by more than one commentator, notably J. H. Charlesworth, one of the leading specialists in the Odes today. He manages to find in their imagery all sorts of allusions to Jesus of Nazareth. This is because the Odes are, in a sense, proto-Christian, in that they involve belief in semi-personified divine intermediaries; this type of thinking was to evolve in some circles into a more defined spiritual Son and Revealer, and then into an incarnated Jesus. The Odes' central focus is still on God, but this is a God with rich and active emanations. Knowledge of God comes through those intermediary forces, which the poet styles Word, Son, Messiah. While the poetry is often allusive and obscure, everything in it can be traced to scripture and traditional Jewish imagery, even if more imaginatively used than usual.

As an example of how a document can be forced into the fully-developed Christian mold, Charlesworth declares that the crucifixion is "significantly portrayed" (*Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol.2, p.732). Here is one of the two main passages he draws on, Ode 27 in its wispy entirety:

- 1 I extended my hands and hallowed my Lord
- 2 For the expansion of my hands is his sign
- 3 And my extension is the upright wood.

The word "wood" is often used in later Syriac literature for the cross (of Jesus), but it also means "tree," and the word has ties with the image of the wood-tree of Paradise which symbolizes a source of life. Ode 37 begins: "I extended my hands toward the Lord, and toward the Most High I raised my voice." Here, the poet is making supplication to God, with no allusion to wood or cross. Ode 27, then, with its spread hands—i.e., arms extended straight out sideways—is more likely a mystically significant prayer posture, and not an echo of the cross. Moreover, the "Lord" in verse 1 can be seen as a reference to God and thus the "sign" belongs to him. As a general rule, all references to "Lord" in the Odes are to God, except when linked with the Messiah. Thus, Charlesworth's claim that Ode 27 is a "portrayal" of the crucifixion is highly dubious.

So, too, is his claim that the Odes have "a joyous tone of thanksgiving for the advent of the Messiah" (*op.cit.*, p.726). Throughout these hymns, it is God himself with whom the poet is intoxicated; it is he to whom thanks is given for

salvation, he is the "Savior." We are not facing simply a lack of all the basic elements of Jesus' life, death and resurrection here. The void extends to any sense of Jesus as a recent figure or personality who is the object of the Odist's faith and the reason for his allegiance to the sect.

Instead, the Odes speak of the nature and means of God's salvation, and it is through knowledge of him. No death, resurrection or atonement is in view anywhere. In Ode 6, this saving knowledge of God is a "stream" which becomes a broad river, sweeping over the earth, quenching the thirst of all who drink. The spread of water as a metaphor for the flowing forth of God's spirit and knowledge is a longstanding Jewish idea. Here none of this knowledge is said to come through an historical Jesus, though that idea, together with the phrase "living water" was to be applied to such a figure in the Gospel of John. We are not necessarily seeing a direct development from one to the other within the same community, but simply an evolution of ideas flowing within a network of streams during a certain period, probably within a certain geographical area.

There are metaphorical intimations of incarnation in the Odes, and to understand these is to understand the philosophical route the intermediary Son took in arriving at the human Jesus of Nazareth. Ode 23 introduces the idea of descent from God:

- 4 Walk in the knowledge of the Most High
and you shall know the grace of the Lord generously....
- 5 And his thought was like a letter,
and his will descended from on high....
- 7 And many hands rushed to the letter,
to seize it and to take it and read it.

Again, it is God's knowledge which saves. How has it reached humanity? Something from God descends to earth: his thought, his will. Personified Wisdom, with her journeys to the world and her appeals to the sons and daughters of men to hear her (in Proverbs and other writings) are an expression of this fundamental idea. Here the Odist uses the metaphor of a letter containing the thought of God. Then he introduces a personification. The "head" of the letter is revealed as

18b even the Son of Truth from the Most High Father.

Here the poet labels this descending channel of Divine Knowledge "the Son," the Son that is Truth, or rather, God's Truth that is the Son. The Son is the "head" of God's emanations. He is the channel through which God's grace and salvation flow. While the Odist directs most of his expressions of love to God himself, on occasion he speaks of his love for the Son, as in Ode 3, verse 5:

I love the Beloved and my soul loves him, and where his rest is, there also am I...because I love him that is the Son, I shall become a son.

The Beloved is a traditional term (mostly found in Diaspora Judaism) applied to an entity beloved by God, such as the Messiah or Israel as a whole. Here it is

used of the Son, symbolizing the loving aspect of God. Later it was applied to the figure of Jesus.

In Ode 7, at times referred to as an "incarnational Ode," the poet introduces the idea that God, in sending his knowledge to the world, assumes a likeness to humanity.

- 3 He [God] has generously shown himself to me in his simplicity,
because his kindness has diminished his grandeur.
- 4 He became like me that I might receive him.
In form [or essence, image] that I might put him on.
- 5 And I trembled not when I saw him
because he was gracious to me.
- 6 Like my nature he became, that I might understand him.
And like my form [essence, etc.] that I might not turn away from him.

While such sentiments have suggested a poetic allusion to Jesus of Nazareth, we must recognize that the Odist is not introducing any historical figure who represents the form God has taken on. Rather, it is God himself who undergoes the transformation; it is God to whom the poet is relating, not Jesus. This fits the idea behind the poetic metaphor: God, in approaching humanity to confer knowledge, allows humanity to understand him by assuming human conceptions. All philosophers believed that the true nature of God was utterly alien to anything the human mind could comprehend, and so he had to 'translate himself into concepts the material world was familiar with.'¹⁰⁴

This in itself was a diminishing of his greatness (v.3), and it would explain the meaning behind the word "sacrifice" in verse 10: "...allowed me to benefit from his sacrifice." This sacrifice is not a blood one, but the surrender of God's transcendent nature and perfection to approach the mind of humanity. Through his emanations, God becomes like the Odist so that "I might understand him," that "I might put him on." The Son is God disclosing himself by revelation. Only by God approaching the human being in ways that can be understood is the poet able to receive God into himself. This taking on of God, even an ingesting of God, is one the Odes' primary mystical images, often expressed in metaphors of food and drink. (Some of those metaphors would eventually be put into the mouth of the Johannine Jesus, used to describe himself.)

Ode 19 is full of such metaphors:

- 1 A cup of milk was offered to me,
and I drank it in the sweetness of the delight of the Lord.
- 2 The Son is the cup,
and he who was milked is the Father;
and she who milked him is the Holy Spirit....
- 4 And the Holy Spirit opened her bosom,
and mingled the milk of the two breasts of the Father...
And those who take (it) are in the fullness of the right hand.

- 6 The womb of the Virgin took (it)
and she received conception and brought forth....
- 8 And she [labored] and brought forth a Son without.. pain,
For it did not happen without purpose....

Considering that in Ode 33, the "perfect Virgin" is clearly a reference to personified Wisdom announcing the sort of message one finds in her mouth in Proverbs and Sirach 24, any suggestion that here in Ode 19 it constitutes a reference to Mary is misplaced. This passage is not about history, it is poetic allegory. The Odist is presenting a symbolic picture of the relationship between various aspects of the Godhead. He uses the metaphor of divine milk, with four divine personages involved in dispensing it to humanity: Father, Son, Holy Spirit, Wisdom (the Virgin). Wisdom in some ancient Jewish traditions is a kind of consort to the Father; Philo makes her mother to the Logos (*De Fuga*, 109). This 'mother' gives birth to God's Son and emanation—in Philo's language, the Logos. These are poetic, allegorical ways of representing the workings of Deity. The end result is the translation of God's knowledge and peace, which itself bestows perfection and salvation (v.5). The Gospel Son puts in no appearance here, nor does any idea of a salvation effected through his death and resurrection.

The essence of the Odes is the knowledge of God descending to humanity in personified form, becoming teacher, helper, companion; this "Messiah" is known before the foundation of the world, and he "gives life to persons forever by the truth of his name" (Ode 41). Into this mystical mold, it is easy to see how Jesus of Nazareth, the "Word" made flesh, could later be poured.¹⁰⁵

In such a light, it might be claimed that the Odes of Solomon are not "Christian" at all, but a highly imaginative expression of one of those forms of Judaism which have moved beyond the 'mainstream.' But such a definition is only relevant in an orthodox context. In the picture of emergent Christianity portrayed thus far, the Odes are a piece in a multi-colored mosaic. They belong as much to Christianity as does the preaching kerygma of Paul, as does the heavenly High Priest of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

As certain strands of Jewish thinking increasingly saw God as a spectrum, pulsating in an outward stream of activity, pulses of divine knowledge, the Law, of saving graces and redeeming figure-forces, they created for themselves an immensely rich spiritual dimension and a mystical universe whose subtleties have been largely lost to us and whose outlook has long since ceased to speak to times which came after. Indeed, it was a phase which degenerated quite quickly into something less rich, less mystical, but something more accessible, as elitist sects broadened into popular religious movements. Once this overarching spiritual canopy, illumined by the sacred writings, descended to the material world and was translated into mundane history, it lost much of its wonder, and scripture went slumming as the repository of mere prophecies of earthbound events. One of the things which suffered was Christian literature, for it was forced henceforth to tread upon the earth. It could be maintained that no poet to equal the Odist was ever again produced.

The Odes of Solomon are a jewelled window onto the early development of Christ belief, part of a "proto-Christian" stream. Their composer inhabits a community which has cultivated the communicating aspect of God, a layer superimposed upon the traditional Jewish worship of God but still oriented toward him. There is as yet no firm development of an incarnation—certainly not in "flesh"—and the Word or Son is probably not yet perceived as a separate entity, only a highlighted aspect of God, an emanation from him that serves a revelatory, mediatorial function, channel of the knowledge which brings salvation to the elect.

But a complex of spiritual attributes, titles and feelings are coalescing around this emanation, drawing the believer's and the Odist's attentions, not away from God himself but toward a different way of viewing him, although the Odist often bypasses this aspect entirely, keeping the traditional focus directly on the Father and Lord. Those parts of God are beginning to assume their own personality, attracting love and worship of their own. They are developing their own spiritual mythology, drawn from older Wisdom speculation and outside influences. The Word as God's voice, Wisdom as his helper and channel of knowledge, the Son as his only-begotten and his representative in the world, are merging into an hypostasis, a stripped-off aspect of God with an identity of its own. Inevitably this process did not stand still, but led to the increasing sense of a separate divine personage. Mystical imagery became historical biography, and the immediate source of salvation passed from God to his Son.

When the evangelists brought Jesus of Nazareth into the light, they gave the Son a face.

In the formative period of the 1st century CE, when no historical Jesus had yet set foot on the scene, a rich panoply of Son/Christ/Savior belief was thriving across the eastern half of the Roman empire, expressions of the new intermediary Son philosophy, conceiving of different routes to salvation through him. As in most such uncoordinated movements, centripetal forces eventually pulled this diversity into a common central pool, and the strongest, most advantageous and most appealing elements established themselves as a new core, a new orthodoxy. This later development then became the standard by which the earlier manifestations were evaluated, and the present was read back into the past.

A New Nativity Scene

Within a handful of years of Jesus' supposed death, we know of Christian communities all over the eastern Mediterranean. As Ernst Haenchen has pointed out in his monumental study of Acts (*The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, p. 103, 298) the congregations at Damascus, Antioch, Ephesus and Rome were founded by unknown Christians, as were no doubt countless other communities. Reading between the lines of the picture Acts presents concerning the spread of the faith, as well as between the lines of Paul's own letters, one perceives that Damascus already possessed a Christian community before Paul was converted, and that both Antioch and Rome had congregations well before Paul's activities.

Rome is a case of special interest. Paul's letter to the Romans, probably written in the mid-50s, reveals a community that has "many years" behind it (15:23). In the orthodox picture of Christian beginnings, how could such a community have formed so soon? Who brought the kerygma there? How could that "complex movement taking form within several complex societies" which Wayne Meeks has remarked on have grown up virtually overnight out of the efforts of a few dusty disciples from Judea?

It has been suggested that those Jews from all over the empire who were living in Jerusalem at the time of the first Pentecost (Acts 2:5) may have been converted in large numbers and subsequently went back to convert their fellow Jews at home in equally great numbers. This scenario is entirely based on Acts which, as an actual record of history, has no reliable standing. Moreover, the feasibility of such a development is highly dubious, that Jews visiting Jerusalem were converted in great numbers to the proposition that a recently crucified man was God and went home to convert in turn many of their distant countrymen to the same blasphemous idea.

The true answer is indicated by the later churchman known as Ambrosiaster, who remarked in his commentary on the epistle to the Romans that "One ought not to condemn the Romans, but to praise their faith; because without seeing any signs or miracles and without seeing any of the apostles, they nevertheless accepted faith in Christ, although according to a Jewish rite."¹⁰⁶

Such a tradition points to something very revealing. Christ belief in Rome arose independently of any proselytizing movement from outside. No apostles inspired by Jesus had arrived from the east to preach a Galilean god-man. The Romans were not responding to an outlandish message about a crucified man executed as a subversive in Jerusalem. The multiplicity of early Christian expression does not need an explanation in the context of a single point of origin and an initially pristine doctrine about Jesus.

Rather, *Christianity was born in a thousand places*, in a host of different forms, growing out of the broad, fertile religious soil of the time. It sprang up in many independent circles and sects, both inside and outside Palestine, the product of many minds. All of it was the expression of the prevailing religious philosophy of divine intermediaries and the cravings of the age for "salvation."

Paul and the Jerusalem brotherhood were simply one strand of this Christ belief, though an important and eventually very influential one. The Pauline interpretation of the spiritual Christ caught on in many places, and later, in a myth-making process of its own, the Jerusalem circle with Paul as its satellite was adopted as the originating cell of the whole Christian movement. But while Paul tramped the imperial roads, while Jews and gentiles in Rome were adopting faith in Christ "without seeing any of the apostles," no such unity or point of origin existed.

The Johannine Community

The Fourth Gospel

Another example of diversity within the New Testament is found in the Gospel of John. While its overall narrative structure is loosely the same as that of the Synoptics, the content of its teachings by Jesus is dramatically different. The great puzzle faced by Johannine scholars has always been to account for this. Did the unique christology of John arise independently of any contact with the Synoptics, or was it a later conscious supplanting of the earlier picture of Jesus by a newly-developed one in the Johannine community? If the latter, why? Why such a drastically different substitute? (The question of the Fourth Gospel's dependence on the Synoptics will be addressed later in the book.)

Scholars have tended to approach the Johannine branch of the faith as though it were some ancient Shangri-la, a mountain fastness penetrated and converted by some mysterious apostle from Jerusalem, only to shut itself off from the wider world of the Christian movement and evolve in its own unique fashion. The view of Jesus contained in the Fourth Gospel is unlike any other in the New Testament. When the superficial overlay of the pattern of Jesus' ministry and passion is stripped away—something borrowed from a Synoptic source—one finds a figure who bears little relationship to the Jesus of Mark and his redactors, or to the Jesus of Paul.

By any standard, the teachings of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel are bizarre. In fact, it might be said that there are *no* teachings of Jesus, unless it be the proclamation of himself, for he has nothing else to say. He is the Son, the light, life, the living bread, the living water. He has been sent from God, he is the one come down from heaven, he is the revealer of the Father, of the transcendent God whom "you do not know" (7:28). There are no ethics. To "love one another" is little more than an in-house rule, not a universal moral dictum; 13:35 shows that he is simply advocating love among his followers who are part of an elect, so that "all will know that you are my disciples." In 12:48 he tells his listeners that judgment will be based on whether a man has accepted or rejected his words. In 6:29 he defines the "work that God requires." It is: "Believe in the one whom he has sent." Have faith in Jesus, know the Father through him, and this in itself will guarantee that you will never die. Consume the Son as the bread of life, drink him as the living water and you will possess immortality.

Something is seriously awry here. The evangelist portrays Jesus as standing up in the marketplace or in a synagogue and declaring to all the world the most

mystical, pretentious pronouncements about himself. "I am the light of the world." "I am the door of the sheepfold." "I am the resurrection and the life." But the problem is solved if we regard these declarations as the theology of a previous phase of this community *about* the object of their worship: the mythical and mystical Son and Word, a purely spiritual entity, the mediatorial channel from God (perhaps a mild advance on the Son and Word in the Odes). It is only when they are placed in the mouth of a human Jesus walking through Palestine that they take on this air of unreality, this impression of megalomania.¹⁰⁷

Such teaching by the Johannine Jesus would represent the earliest stratum of material in the Gospel of John. It represents a pre-Gospel faith based on belief in God's revelation of knowledge about himself and the everlasting life he makes available through that knowledge. The Johannine Son and Christ is thus a *Revealer* Son, which is quite different from the Pauline version of a dying and rising sacrificial one. In fact, this Revealer Christ is cast in a setting which has some gnostic features, which is why scholarship has tended to suggest that it may initially have been produced within a strongly proto-gnostic milieu; on this point, we will return to the Fourth Gospel in the next chapter on Gnosticism.

And what of the crucifixion in John? It presents a monumental anomaly, for before the Johannine community encountered the Synoptic Christ, there was no suffering, sacrificial Savior in its library of ideas (just as there was none in the Odes). When the Synoptics came along, their tale of an earthly ministry, death and resurrection was laid over the original Revealer material. Those 'teachings' were placed in the mouth of the new historical Jesus.

And yet, the evangelist doing the job would not allow the newcomer to interfere with the earlier tradition of salvation through faith in the Revealer Son. In John, Jesus does not redeem through his death and resurrection. There is not a whisper about atonement or any salvific consequence of Jesus' death. John has also altered Jesus' very personality, exalting him above any human weakness. He is not allowed to suffer—not even emotionally: there is no Gethsemane in John. Instead of remaining silent at Pilate's interrogation, he talks back to him. The cry of despair on the cross is not sounded, and there is no Temptation story to even suggest that Jesus could be tempted. As for the problem of baptizing for sin, as in Mark, John solves it by simply eliminating the baptism of Jesus altogether.

The establishment of the Eucharist must go as well, since it is based on a sacrificial concept. The passage regularly pointed to as "embodying eucharistic teaching," 6:51-58, does not do this. Jesus styles himself the living bread, the bread of life, and declares that to possess eternal life one must eat his flesh and drink his blood, but this is in no way connected to his death; he is not declaring himself to be the sacramental center of a new rite or a new covenant. This is not sacrificed blood, not slain flesh. The flesh and blood of these verses (51c-56) are an enlargement on the previous metaphor of bread alone, and remain within its parameters: they are additional symbols representing the ingestion of divine knowledge (as in the Odes), imparted through the person of Jesus. The idea is tied full circle by verse 58: "This is the bread that came down from heaven."

The evangelist has introduced these elements of blood and flesh but he has kept them in the service of the original Johannine soteriology: salvation through revelation, through Jesus as a descending Revealer figure, not a sacrificial one—similar, as we shall see, to the gnostic type of redeemer. As for the crucifixion in John, Jesus' raising up on the cross is an "ascension," a glorification (12:23). It is the ultimate support for the proof of his claims, the ultimate miracle. Jesus is in control throughout the trial and crucifixion, bearing all in sublime detachment, fulfilling what must be "accomplished" by the will of his Father. The two strata of Revealer and Crucified One have simply not been integrated.

The Witness to the Son in the Johannine Epistles

In comparing the Johannine documents, it must be asked: which was written first, the epistles or the Gospel? That the former predate the latter should be a natural conclusion. Yet traditionally, the great majority of scholars who have examined these documents have opted for the reverse. This question is addressed in detail in Appendix 5 (p.674), and the priority of the epistles will be assumed in the balance of this chapter.

The most striking feature that emerges about the epistles when comparing them to the Gospel is the void on the latter's historical Jesus figure. This is nowhere so evident as in a key passage in chapter 5:

⁶This is he who came (or, has come) through water and blood: Jesus Christ; not by the water only, but by the water and the blood, and the Spirit is the one bearing witness, because the Spirit is the truth. ⁷For there are three who bear witness, ^xthe Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three are in agreement. ⁹We accept the witness of men, but the witness of God is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given concerning his Son. ¹⁰He who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart, but he who disbelieves God makes him out to be a liar, by refusing to accept God's own witness to his Son. "And this is the witness: that God has given us eternal life, and that this life is found in his Son. ¹²He who possesses the Son has that life; he who does not possess the Son of God has not that life. [From the NEB translation, with slight changes in the direction of the literal Greek.]

First, we must note that the overall effect is devoid of any sense of a life of Jesus. It is the witness of God which alone provides belief in the Son and the fact that the Son is the channel to eternal life. There is a complete silence on any ministry of Jesus and his personal teachings about himself and about that eternal life. (If the Gospel had preceded the epistle, it is inconceivable that Jesus' own witness to these things would not be appealed to here.)

We should also note that the writer does not present us with the necessity to believe that Jesus of Nazareth, or any other human man, *was* the Son. Nor are any historical events appealed to in support of such a proposition. Instead, as in Paul, it is a question of believing *in* the Son of God. God's witness concerns the *fact* of the Son and the eternal life which is derived from such a figure, not to any identity he had nor deed he had performed.

This does not prevent scholars from suggesting that "water" and "blood" are cryptic references to Jesus' baptism and crucifixion (e.g., R. E. Brown, J. H. Houlden). But though their exact significance is lost to us today—Houlden labels them "enigmatic"—they show all the signs of referring to sacramental or mystical elements relating to the community's beliefs and practices, through which knowledge of, or benefits from, the Son are perceived to flow. The author points to the three elements of Spirit, water and blood as belonging to a common category: all three "bear witness," all three are "in agreement." Since Spirit belongs to the realm of revelation, it follows that water and blood are also revelatory channels. All three are presented as part of the witness of God, and God works through revelation.

Besides, it is not clear how Christ would be seen as having "come" through the events of his baptism and crucifixion. But if we take the verb (an aorist participle: "the one having come") as a reference to the coming of the spiritual Christ into the world through his manifestation in God's revelation, then verse 6 is essentially saying that the Son Jesus Christ has been revealed through the rites of water and blood, whatever they may involve. Together with the general activity of the Spirit, which is one of the community's hallmarks, such things constitute God's witness. God has revealed the Son and the availability of eternal life through him. (Compare 1 Corinthians 15:12-16 in which Paul tells us that knowledge of Christ's resurrection is something that has been revealed by God.)

The writer of this passage, as of the prologue (1:1-4), moves in a milieu of divine revelation, not of the preservation of the teachings and deeds of a recent historical man. As noted, the whole concept of apostolic tradition going back to a Jesus is missing from this epistle, as are any apostles themselves. Note that 9a is simply a comparative to 9b, a general rule, saying: "We are in the habit of accepting testimony from men, so how much more should we accept testimony from God?" Certainly, apostolic testimony is not included in the witnesses enumerated in the previous verses, nor does it appear anywhere else.

The writer makes a point of stressing that the "blood" must be included, with the implication that others are resisting its inclusion. This precludes it being a reference to an historical crucifixion, for who would deny such an event or its central significance? (The issue of docetism is nowhere in evidence in this letter, despite some attempts to introduce it.) If, however, the term relates to a rite which is part of a later layer of theological development about the spiritual Son as a sacrificed figure, we are again looking at an entirely revelatory situation, a scene on a stage which lacks any central character of Jesus of Nazareth.¹⁰⁸

The absence of any historical Jesus at the sect's beginnings is clear in 2:27:

The anointing which you received from him (God) stays with you; you need no other teacher, but you learn all you need to know from his anointing.

This anointing (*chrisma*) seems to be an initiation rite for entry into the sect, and no Christian writer who knew of a teaching Jesus, or who possessed any information derived from him through oral or apostolic tradition, could possibly have said such a thing.

The Gnostic Phenomenon

A Rival Salvation

The present book is not in a position to do justice to the movement known as Gnosticism. It is a distinct field of study within biblical scholarship, although it rightly belongs in a category of its own under the heading of ancient world religion. Recent research into this religious expression has shown that it was not a split-off from Christianity proper, not a heresy from within Christian orthodoxy as the Church Fathers and later apologists viewed and presented it, with much of modern scholarship following suit. Rather, it needs to be seen as a separate line of development out of Jewish and pagan precedents. It has certain parallels to cultic Christ belief as found in the New Testament epistles, especially when Paul and other early Christian circles are seen as believing only in a spiritual heavenly Jesus.

It has sometimes been asked: was Paul in any way a Gnostic, did he hold gnostic beliefs? At times he seems to show certain gnostic characteristics; at others (particularly in the Corinthian epistles and Philippians) he seems to be countering gnostic stances on the part of his rivals. And there is no doubt that 2nd century Gnostics were the first outside Pauline circles to adopt Paul and present him as teaching their own gnostic doctrine. They were able to do so because they undertook a style of exegesis which interpreted Paul's statements symbolically; beneath the literal words lay hidden meanings. At other times, his words could be twisted into a literalness which became almost bizarre. Upon both practices orthodox writers like Irenaeus heaped scorn.

The apparent presence of certain gnostic elements in the Pauline corpus raises the question of priority: did Gnosticism already exist in the outside world penetrated by the early apostles of the Christ, including Paul and those of the Jerusalem sect who may have ranged beyond Palestine? 20th century studies of ancient religion, and particularly of the Nag Hammadi documents discovered in 1945, broadened our knowledge of a genus of Gnostic religion with roots in Judaism, Iranian and possibly even Buddhist elements, as well as a range of Greek philosophy. Walter Bauer's seminal book of 1934, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, brought the question into the spotlight in disturbing fashion. He demonstrated that gnostic forms of Christian belief actually seem to have been established in important centers in the wider empire—in Egypt, in Syrian Edessa, in areas of Asia Minor—sooner than so-called orthodoxy. Did this spell a pre-Christian Gnosticism? Until the Nag Hammadi documents largely

put the issue to rest by answering that question in the affirmative, conservative New Testament scholarship devoted considerable effort in an attempt to disprove this possibility (much as other efforts have been devoted to discrediting Christian dependence on Greek mystery cult concepts, or on Platonic cosmology and philosophy).

It is regularly pointed out that the full-blown Gnosticism which the later orthodox Church was familiar with and forced to counter from the 2nd century on can be evidenced only in the 2nd century, and not clearly before. Should the 1st century, then, be looked upon as a time of germination, when forces and concepts were active which would lead to that full-blown development? Of the ideas which became integrated into the end result, were certain ones current on the 1st century scene, some to be absorbed, some to be rejected by Paul and others? In any event, it is no longer possible to believe that the roots of those ideas lay in a Jesus of Nazareth or the events of the Gospels.

On the question of whether a proto-Gnosticism may have been developing even in the 1st century BCE, Douglas Parrott has this to say in his introduction to *Eugnostos the Blessed* in the unearthed Nag Hammadi documents:

Because of the presence of Seth (though unnamed in the tractate), *Eugnostos* must be thought of as Sethian, in some sense. However, since it is not classically Gnostic and lacks other elements of developed Sethian thought, it can only be characterized as proto-Sethian....A very early date is suggested by the fact that Stoics, Epicureans and astrologers are called 'all the philosophers.' That characterization would have been appropriate in the first century B.C.E., but not later. [*The Nag Hammadi Library*, p.221]

Defining Gnosticism

Many have been the attempts to provide a simple definition of Gnosticism. In its fullest flowering in the 2nd century and beyond, from Mesopotamia to Gaul, there were many sects and many different varieties of doctrine, but the commonest features of mature gnostic belief were these: Something had gone wrong in Heaven within the workings and evolution of the various parts of the Godhead, faults and weaknesses lay in some of those emanations of God, and the creation of the world of matter and humans had resulted. This was a great misfortune, since the world was an evil place. As part of that heavenly malfunction, pieces of divinity had fallen into matter, souls now residing in a certain class of human beings. Through varied processes of revelation and salvation—sometimes including a heavenly revealer-savior who descended to the material realm—these 'gnostic' humans were discovering their true natures. Through this secret knowledge, or "gnosis," they were learning how they could re-ascend to the world of light, to their rightful home in heaven and reintegration with the Deity.

An essential part of the full-blown gnostic myth was the idea that an evil or arrogant divine manifestation or rebel angel had created the material world of humans and now ruled over it. Some Gnostics equated this creator divinity with

the God of the Old Testament, Yahweh himself. Through channels that remain obscure, Gnosticism grounded many of its features in the Jewish scriptures, particularly Genesis. These it combined with Greek theosophical speculation based largely on the creation myths outlined in Plato's *Timaeus*. Whether this means that the movement grew out of radical Jewish circles which had adopted esoteric features of Greek philosophy, or whether it began with gentiles directly linked with or influenced by fringe elements in the Jewish Diaspora, is still uncertain. (This question lies at the heart of the great debate over the origins of Gnosticism, a debate which cannot be investigated here.) But in the gnostic thought world, the true, highest God stood over and above the traditional God of the Jews, and the latter was regarded as an evil and oppressive sub-deity.

Most of the various varieties of Gnosticism expended their efforts on cosmological speculations which seem bizarre and alien to us today—and so they seemed to heresiologists like Irenaeus as well. It was a kind of heavenly creation mythology gone wild. Heaven and God himself were regarded as a "Pleroma," a 'fullness' of divine emanations which had multiplied like dividing cells in a laboratory dish, producing a hierarchy of divine beings (many female) with various powers and characteristics—and a multitude of personal names. Such entities (Ralph P. Martin calls them "offshoots of deity") were referred to as "aeons." The evil ones tended to be termed "archons" (as in Paul's "rulers [archons] of this age" in 1 Corinthians 2:8). Depending on the particular gnostic system, a certain aeon could be accorded the role of creator, another the role of redeemer descending into the lower world to bring saving gnosis; others had various duties to fill in the heavenly world, both aiding and impeding salvation.

Some systems, such as that of Valentinus and the Sethian Gospel of the Egyptians from Nag Hammadi (not to be confused with the apocryphal Gospel of the Egyptians preserved in fragments in the patristic literature), named one of these aeons "Christ," and there is no reason to think that this is a borrowing from orthodox Christianity. In the Sethian Gospel, he is "the great Christ" who "is the son of the ineffable silence, who came forth from the great invisible and incorruptible Spirit" (60,7-11), who "established thrones in glory" (54,20-1). While there may be little in common between the two, with a much less chaotic fecundity on the Christian side, the heavenly hierarchy in Paul, in Hebrews and Revelation, Hermas and the Odes of Solomon inhabits the same basic world in which the various entities involved in the workings of God and salvation are emanations of the highest deity.

Gnosticism eventually encountered and rubbed shoulders with the Christ of the developing orthodox Church based on the new historicist interpretation of the Gospels. Some sects remained largely unaffected and continued to lack a specific heavenly redeemer entity. These included the Sethian Gnostics who looked upon the legendary Old Testament son of Adam as a revealer; others chose distant historical figures like Zostrianos (derived from Zoroaster) and the Samaritan Dositheus. Another class of gnostic sects had already-established redeemer figures of an essentially mythical nature, such as the heavenly Man in the

Apocryphon of John, the savior Derdekeas in the Paraphrase of Shem, and the Illuminator in the Apocalypse of Adam (see below); such saviors generally maintained their own integrity, making it difficult for scholars to identify them with or derive them from the Gospel Jesus. Most recently, these redeemer myths have come to be seen as independent developments within Gnosticism, arising in parallel or even prior to the Christian Christ.

In addition to these, those who syncretized with orthodox Christianity to a fuller extent, adapting their own mythical savior to the Gospel figure, created what is now termed "Christian Gnosticism." They soon saw themselves as being proper interpreters of Jesus of Nazareth (whom they usually rendered docetic) and what he had taught. Their favorite type of document was the Dialogue, in which Jesus is represented—usually following his resurrection and prior to his ascension—as teaching gnostic doctrine to his disciples, including Gospel figures like Peter and Thomas. It was this species of Gnosticism which attracted considerable antagonism from developing orthodox circles, who saw them as heretics from within their own perceived orthodox heritage.

Gnosticism and Paul

In that enterprise, some of them co-opted Paul as an apostle of their gnostic Jesus, and read a preaching of gnostic doctrine by him into his epistles. By any measure, however, the essentials of mature gnostic myth are not to be found in Paul, only certain secondary characteristics of gnostic thought, and these are best interpreted as having been 'in the air' ideas which proto-Gnosticism itself was in the process of building on as well.

Much of this commonality is reflected in the terminology. Gnosticism was elitist, and divided human beings into three classes, although this was based on the idea that these three natures were present in all people and the predominant one determined one's character. Those who possessed the saving gnosis through superior qualities of soul, who were essentially predestined for redemption, were "*gnostikoi*" (having knowledge) or "*pneumatikoi*," meaning "spiritual men." Below these were two categories of those not so destined. The lowest were the "*choics*" or "*hylics*" (earthly, of matter), who had no hope of salvation; a median group were designated "*psychics*" who might possibly be 'converted' to spiritual status. (See Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis*, p.91-2.)

This system of classification became fully developed in mature Gnosticism, but foreshadowings of it can be found in Paul, both on the side of his opponents and on his own, though not always with clearly defined meanings. The first part of 1 Corinthians is largely devoted to countering a party in Corinth who were declaring themselves "strong" and "wise" (4:10), who were "free to do anything" (6:12). Such people were "perfected," possessing the Spirit and divine wisdom and were already 'resurrected' into the spiritual kingdom.

Paul condemns these attitudes and posturings, but he too has certain echoes of the same things. He speaks of spiritual men (*pneumatikos*, 2:15) who are able to understand the wisdom of God; they as a new creation have gained freedom

from the Law. Similar to mature Gnosticism, Paul rejects the world and its domination over sinful humanity. In 1 Corinthians 2:6-8 he claims a counter-form of wisdom to that of his opponents, this one a "secret wisdom" God has prepared for "the perfected ones" (*teleiois*). It involves, as one might expect, his theology of the cross. And while his Heaven is under-populated by comparison with the gnostic Pleroma, an essential part of that theology is the role of Satan and the demon spirits who have crucified the "Lord of Glory." Like the "Demiurge" of Gnosticism, the subordinate deity responsible for the creation of the material world and now its ruler and oppressor who impedes humanity's access to the ultimate God, Paul's system and that of early Christianity generally is permeated with the concept of evil spirit forces acting malevolently on the world and dividing earth from heaven.

Scholars maintain that this terminology and conceptualizing as voiced by Paul is his own deliberate co-opting of gnostic-oriented language as used by his opponents, turning it to his own purpose and advantage. But if that is the case, Paul in doing so has demonstrated the applicability of such language to his own ideas and their currency in the thought of the time. This not only illuminates the proto-gnostic atmosphere he moved and even shared in, it also explains why in the 2nd century it was relatively easy for a more advanced phase of Gnosticism to drift toward proto-orthodox Christianity based on the Gospel Jesus of Nazareth. As the line of Paul was to evolve toward a human preacher and an earthly Atonement sacrifice, the gnostic line would become equally susceptible to adopting a human Revealer god, a version of the Gospel Jesus, who had taught the secret *gnosis* of salvation to disciples on earth.

The other thing which some scholars have noted about the Corinthian conflict and others like it—but with some perplexity—is the fact that nowhere in this dispute and rivalry is any mention made of the historical Jesus recently crucified in Jerusalem, one who in his ministry had promulgated teachings which should have been pertinent in resolving or shedding light on the debate and rivalry Paul was engaged in. In such a context of no incarnated Christ, we can style Paul and his circle as living and thinking within the proto-gnostic atmosphere that was a part of his time. It remains misleading, however, to simply call Paul "a Gnostic."

A Gnostic Fourth Gospel

The roots of the Gospel of John seem to lie in a proto-gnostic community. Its system of salvation follows the Revealer element, an acquiring of knowledge of God through a descending spiritual entity from Heaven, much like the Son in the Odes of Solomon who brings and constitutes a "living water" (Ode 6:13, etc.) quenching the thirst for knowledge of God. (The scene in John 4:8f of the woman at the well who is offered "living water" by Jesus is a personification of this process; it can by no means be seen as a tradition about an actual event, nor intended as one by the evangelist.) The Odes speak of the "milk" and "honey" of the Lord, his "fruits," while the Gospel uses the motif of "bread of life" (as in 5:48). Ode 10:1 speaks of the "Light" of God, and later in Ode 36, the Son is

"named the Light"; in the Gospel, Jesus proclaims himself to be the "light of the world" (8:12). The Johannine author has personified all these motifs of the spiritual revealing force in the figure of his Synoptic-adopted Jesus.

The footprints of the Johannine Gospel are noticeably gnostic. Dualism pervades its thought, in its contrasts between light and darkness, the world above and the world below, God vs. Satan and those who belong to both. (All of these ideas ultimately have roots in Persian Zoroastrianism.) Like the gnostic elements found in Paul, there are those who know God and those who know only the world and its snares. Like certain of Paul's opponents, those who possess knowledge are already partakers in a resurrection into the kingdom. Like mature Gnosticism, those who acknowledge and have the Son within them form an elite, one seemingly predestined; Jesus is constantly referring to his disciples as a privileged group set apart by God who are enjoined to love him and obey his commands. They must love each other—again, an elitist directive.

Why was the Johannine community led to adopt the Synoptic 'historical' Son? For all the poetry of the Odes, its mythological and mystical dimension could not appeal, not speak, to everyone. Embodying those mythical elements in a human figure—even if only allegorical (though it was not long to remain so)—lent substance, drama, accessibility to these religious concepts. The Son and the salvation he represented could strike the hearts and minds of people of more ordinary bent than the mystic-minded Odists. As for the crucifixion, it is difficult to know how that element would have affected the reader, but its inclusion seems far from intended as something to spur repentance, guilt or pity; and even less to represent the source and means of salvation. Jesus himself, in 17:1-8, lays bare the mind of the author and his gnostic-oriented system:

'Father, the hour has come. Glorify thy Son, that the Son may glorify thee. ²For thou hast made him sovereign over all mankind, to give eternal life to all whom thou hast given him. ³This is eternal life: to know thee who alone art truly God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent. ⁴I have glorified thee on earth by completing the work which thou gavest me to do; and now, Father, glorify me in thine own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world began. I have made thy name known to the men whom thou didst give me out of the world. They were thine, thou gavest them to me, and they have obeyed thy command. [NEB]

The cross is not the source or means of salvation; there is no Atonement idea. The Son's work has already been accomplished before the crucifixion, as verse 4a clearly states. His death is an appendix, a further 'witness' to the Son and his work, an underlining glorification. Eternal life is gained solely by knowing God and his Son. (A similar declaration will be met again in most of the 2nd century apologists, even though they were not Gnostics.) Thus, there is no interest in the ethical teachings of the Synoptics, which John has simply jettisoned.

There is no substantive difference between the 'sending' of a spiritual intermediary Son through revelation to make God known to *gnostikoi*, and the sending of Jesus the Son to earth to make God known to John's elite sect—"the

men whom thou didst give me out of the world"—even if the latter's scenario were meant to represent actual history. The system is essentially the same. It is nothing like that of the Synoptics, whose central teaching to the disciples by Jesus is focused on the Passion: the scriptures taught that the Son of Man would be persecuted, put to death and be resurrected (as in Mark 8:31).

The orthodox Church, with a certain amount of tweaking, eventually took into its bosom this mystical Gospel of John which was anything but orthodox. It is true that the Fourth Gospel is not thoroughly gnostic in the mature sense. There is none of the fantastic Pleroma cosmology, no higher God over a subordinate creator god; nor is its Jesus docetic (he does not need to be because he is essentially treated as symbolic).

But neither is it, as Rudolph styles it (*op.cit.*, p. 159), a case of blurred lines "between primitive Christian and gnostic conceptions," implying successive developments, the second out of the first. Just as we shall see in regard to Ignatius, both sorts of conceptions are emerging more or less in parallel, multiple developing expressions of Christ-Son belief, each with different emphases. The further they progress along their own paths, the farther apart they will grow, until each becomes error and heresy in the eyes of the other. The Gospel of John arose from a proto-gnostic stream, which is why it could be comfortably used by later mature Gnostics; but it took on a primary element from the proto-orthodox stream, just as some of those later mature Gnostics were also to commandeer Mark's Jesus of Nazareth as their gnostic Revealer. It is not a case of later Gnosticism, or even the Gospel of John, borrowing from earlier "primitive Christian conceptions." Mark's Jesus was no more 'primitive' than John's, and Mark's Jesus *regarded as an historical figure* seems to have been contemporary with both him and emerging Gnosticism.

We might note that during the same period in which the Church was claiming the Gospel of John for itself (in the mid to late 2nd century) it was rejecting other Gospels which had become compromised in the course of developing out of the Synoptics, most frequently Matthew. Many "apocryphal" gospels of the 2nd and 3rd centuries survive in fragments, as quoted by various Christian writers of the time. They all appear to have been fresh adaptations of the Jesus story for use in various communities which in orthodox eyes held to heretical or otherwise unacceptable views, some of them gnostic as in the Gospel of the Egyptians. Thus their texts fell out of favor and were not preserved beyond antiquity. They testify to the variety of strands of development which eventually gave way to the triumph of orthodoxy as we know it.

Along with many apocryphal Acts of this and that apostle, this proliferation of many versions of the original Gospel story reveals the absolute freedom their authors assumed in altering source texts, creating wholly new scenes and story lines to support various beliefs and figures of interest. That the same was not done in the earlier days of the development of the canonical Gospels themselves, it is impossible to believe. Of course, we see this very thing in the redactions of Mark in the Gospels of Matthew, Luke and John.

The Arrival of Gnosticism

Ancient writers, followed by some moderns, have regarded Gnosticism as beginning with Simon Magus, the legendary Samaritan magician briefly introduced in Acts 8, who seems to have been a prophetic figure who garnered a following in both Palestine and Rome sometime in the middle of the 1st century. Anything known about him, however, is pure legend of 2nd century provenance, and it is probable that the 'traditions' about him mentioned by Justin and Irenaeus are not dependable. He served rather as a convenient fountainhead of heretical gnostic doctrine for later heresiologists (illustrating the principle that ideas tend to be imputed to specific originating figures). It was said that Simon promoted himself as God and his companion Helen as his "first thought" emanation, offering redemption through faith in himself. Such claims (whether authentic or apocryphal), reminding later Christians of certain gnostic ideas, may have led to his association with Gnosticism, but it may be that he simply reflected certain proto-gnostic concepts active in the 1st century.

The first identifiable preacher of what can reasonably be labeled Gnosticism is the shadowy figure of Cerinthus. He seems to have lived and taught in Asia Minor (alternatively, in Egypt) at the beginning of the 2nd century. According to Irenaeus, he proclaimed a new, unknown high God, while his view of Jesus was, on the gnostic scale, a relatively primitive one. Certhinus (followed shortly after by Basilides) is said to have held that the spirit of the divine Christ entered a human man, Jesus son of Mary and Joseph, at the time of his baptism, and left him just before the passion and crucifixion, so that the latter was something suffered solely by the human man Jesus. (For Basilides, according to the 3rd century Hippolytus, Jesus/Christ shape-changed with Simon of Cyrene, and it was the unfortunate Simon who suffered crucifixion.) At no time was the divine Son of God contaminated by installing himself within this Jesus' human nature.

Raymond E. Brown (*The Johannine Epistles*, p.766) has suggested that the christological views being opposed in 1 John 4 were those of Cerinthus. While the passage is perhaps vague enough to allow for such a thing, nothing in it particularly points to this early brand of Gnosticism. (It equally fits, as has been argued, a denial of the basic idea of earthly incarnation for the spiritual Christ.) Cerinthus, however, if the later reports about him have not been guilty of subsequent confusion or revision as to what he actually believed or when he believed it (which is by no means secure where any of the early Gnostics are concerned), would have been reacting to the initial spread of the idea of an historical Jesus. He is the first 'Christian' we know of to reflect a philosophical motivation for denying a full incarnation for the spiritual Son and an actual participation in human nature.

Before long, a different solution arose and eventually took precedence. The Son of God *had* been born and lived his own life in the world, but this life had been within a body which only "seemed" to be human flesh and blood. The infant had passed through Mary without absorbing any of her substance. This stance is called "docetism" based on the Greek verb *dokein*, "to seem." Though

he appeared to be a man to those around him, Jesus was really a phantom, and thus his sufferings, his bodily experiences, were not real. Thus, the divine Christ could again be protected from participating in human nature, an objectionable concept for many.

Gnosticism underwent its own riotous diversity reflected in a multitude of sects, so that it becomes almost impossible to speak of it collectively in anything but broad generalities. Ironically, the most famous 'Gnostic,' Marcion, almost fails the Gnosticism test, since he lacked more than one essential feature of that generality. (Marcion will be examined more closely in chapter 30.) Valentinus, a rival of Marcion in the 140s, led a movement which split into different schools; it possessed a plurality of "Christ" figures. An early Valentinian document, the Gospel of Truth, contains a "son" Jesus Christ who, reminiscent of Paul, is referred to as God's "secret" (24,13). He is a "hidden mystery," a Revealer figure who "shed light upon those who were, because of their forgetfulness, in darkness" (18,15). But he is also, like Paul's, a Son crucified, though not for purposes of atonement but to better deliver knowledge:

For this reason [*for shedding light*] Error became angry at him and persecuted him. He was nailed to a tree and became fruit of the knowledge of the Father. [18,21-26]

The agency of this nailing to a tree is not a human agency, but the mystical figure of "Error" who, like Paul's demon spirits and the "god of that world" in the Ascension of Isaiah who kill the Son in ignorance, is capable of jealousy and persecution. (Its very styling as "Error" allegorizes that ignorance.) The 'nailing to a tree' harks back to primitive cultic Christ expression (as in 1 Peter 2:24). A few pages later (20,10-35), the suffering and death of Jesus is presented as part of a scene implying descent into a lower sphere, the taking on of "corrupt rags" which are afterwards discarded for the putting on of "incorruptibility." In that nailing to the tree, he is wrapped in the document of knowledge: the "will" (testament) of the Father. He "published the father's edict [i.e., the Truth] on the cross," an idea superficially similar to Colossians 2:14, although the latter speaks of the edict nailed to the cross as something negative, now discredited and displaced, namely the Law. None of this bears any tone or mention of earthly incarnation; it is the same heavenly mysticism as we find in the epistles, with the Son operating in an entirely mythological atmosphere.

Nor should we see it as a mystical rendering of an established orthodox view of an historical cross, since there is nothing in the text to guide us to such a possibility (any more than there is in Hebrews' heavenly sacrifice a rendering of Calvary). In keeping with its non-historical atmosphere, the scene of the cross is presented as an act of "teaching." In this role of teacher the Son is differently received by "wise men" and "children." This again is not Gospel or historical literalness, but a way of presenting the reception of knowledge from the spiritual Son by those who reject it and those who accept it. (The latter can only be those who are predestined as Gnostics.) Included among the ones being enlightened are the heavenly "aeons," which again associates the cross with a spiritual scene.

This is a type of allegory common to Gnosticism; it is seen in abundance in the Odes of Solomon, though not in connection with any death of the Son.

The Jesus Christ of the Gospel of Truth is likely derived from earlier cultic concepts of a heavenly Jesus Christ, perhaps related to those of Paul. (There is no "higher God" in Valentinianism.) Later in Valentinus' career, or possibly only under his pupil Ptolemy, this spiritual Christ was reinterpreted in terms of the Gospel Jesus, and in a docetic fashion (a feature not found in the Gospel of Truth, since there is no imagined visit to earth). Many scholars imagine that there are echoes of the Gospels and the teachings of Jesus to be found in the Gospel of Truth, but this is on the same level as the supposed echoes of Jesus' teachings found in the New Testament epistles. (See Appendix 6 [p.677] for a discussion of one scholar's attempt to find New Testament dependencies in the Gospel of Truth.)

In the Apocryphon of John, its redeemer figure descends out of the realm of light in the Pleroma, down into the realm of darkness and chaos (30,1 If). This heavenly "Man" assumes the form (likeness) of his seed (mankind has been made in his image), entering the prison of the body in order to deceive the powers of that world who do not recognize him (30,20), again a familiar motif in Paul (1 Cor. 2:8) and elsewhere. Only in the final redaction of the document is this descending Man identified with Christ. In a further gnostic development on the Ascension of Isaiah, the Apocryphon of John equates the deceived head of the archons with the evil creator god of the Old Testament.

In the Apocalypse of Adam, the "third Illuminator" is in conflict with "the god of the powers," the evil archons who seek to destroy him. He performs "signs and wonders in order to scorn the powers and their rulers" (77,1-3); these miracles evidently take place in the realm of those powers. The Illuminator is said to be born from a virgin womb, by a desert, in a garden, dropped from heaven into the sea, borne by a bird onto a mountain, carried by dragons into a cave, these being aspects of his 'incarnation' into the lower realms of darkness, referred to as the "water." Such experiences are reminiscent of the heavenly scene in Revelation 12 where the woman robed with the sun gives birth to the Messiah, pursued by a dragon, the child snatched into God's presence with no thought of a life on earth.

Finally, the savior Derdekeas in the Paraphrase of Shem merits a detailed look as a revealing example of pre-Christian Gnosticism and the mythology of spiritual redeemers in parallel with, and independent of, the spiritual Christ of early cultic Christianity. For that, the reader is directed to Appendix 7 (p.679). All of these documents present us with a diverse picture of heavenly imaginings on a wide scale throughout the era, imaginings which Paul and his circle shared in, and which ultimately fell to earth to reside in a representative fictional character first embodied in the Gospel of Mark.

Ignatius on the Threshold

Ignatius of Antioch and Gnosticism

The arrival of docetism on the Christian scene is witnessed in the letters of Ignatius. The bishop of Antioch has traditionally been regarded as the author of seven letters out of the fifteen that in ancient times were attributed to him. Of those seven, it is only their shorter versions ("recensions") which are considered authentic to him, since the longer versions are heavily interpolated with Gospel references that are entirely missing in the originals.

Traditional dating of these letters, along with many biographical elements about Ignatius himself, is dependent on the Martyrdom of Ignatius. Its reliability remains in question, as do most biographical accounts of early Christian figures set down at later times. Accepting a certain degree of veracity, and that Ignatius was in fact brought to Rome and died in the arena, leads to dates of either 107 or 116 CE as the year of his death, with the added, perhaps fanciful, detail that the sentence was imposed at Antioch by the emperor Trajan himself on his way to a campaign in the east.

But there has always been reason to doubt that even the seven shorter recensions were written by Ignatius himself. The circumstances they reflect are certainly suspect. It is difficult to believe that under the situation of arrest and transport to Rome by military guard, Ignatius would have had the freedom to receive delegations from several Christian churches along the way. At Smyrna he was also supposedly visited by clerical representatives from three other cities of western Asia Minor, and one wonders at the logistical difficulty which would have been attendant on coordinating such a visit. One also wonders at the willingness of all these bishops and church people to place themselves in danger of being arrested and charged with similar offences. That Ignatius would have had the opportunity and materials to write at such length to so many, and find ways to dispatch all these letters, is questionable as well. There is also some justified doubt that the authorities would have taken the trouble to transport a condemned Christian all the way to Rome just to execute him.

Finally, the letters themselves are suspiciously well crafted, and go on often repetitively and unnecessarily long to make their points, more like little treatises than pieces written under difficulty and duress. Individually, none of these objections may be decisive, but collectively they are enough to give one pause in accepting the letters at face value. Perhaps a subsequent author designed them as a tribute to the martyred bishop and his defence of the new faith, and as vehicles

for the issues they address; but we have no way of knowing how genuine is the scenario in which the letters are cast, and it may be that the Martyrdom has been based on the circumstances portrayed in the letters.

However, that later author would almost certainly have been writing within one or two decades after Ignatius' passing. Some radical scholarship since the late 19th century has tended to date them much later, perhaps as late as 160. But this is unconvincing in view of the absence within the shorter recensions of all but the most spare and basic Gospel data, along with elements like apostolic tradition and succession, and in view of the conclusion that the writer was unfamiliar with any written Gospel. Considering that the longer versions are considerably expanded by a multitude of Gospel references, there is no reason to think that such things would not have been included from the outset if the original letters were composed in the second half of the century.

It has been claimed that the forger, through representing Ignatius as urging obedience by each community to its bishop and presbyters, is advocating Roman authority over other churches. But there is no implication in the letters of any centralized authority, even an advocated one, across the wider Christian world. The Inscription of the epistle to the Romans designates that church as "holding chief place in the territories in the district of Rome," but whether this implies an authority over the others—in any case, the language seems to make it fairly local, as though speaking of one congregation over others—or simply a pre-eminent reputation (perhaps with some rhetorical exaggeration by the writer), cannot be said. The writer never urges deference to any outside church upon the congregations he is writing to. Moreover, in making a bare reference to Peter and Paul, he makes no point of placing them, or any martyrdom for them, in Rome. (This telling silence is similar to that in 1 Clement, which for this reason alone must also be placed at least early in the 2nd century, before such legends about the two apostles were established.) Appealing to Peter and Paul at Rome is something a forger in the latter part of the century would inevitably have done if he were playing up the principle of Roman hegemony. Overall, there is no "mature Church system" anywhere in view.

For all these reasons, the date of the epistles, if they are pseudonymous, cannot be too long after Ignatius' death. Even in that case, with the possible exception of 1 Timothy 6:13 (depending on the dating of the Pastorals in the early 2nd century), they constitute the earliest references in the Christian record outside the Gospels to the basic biographical data about Jesus put forward.

Ignatius' Opponents

If the originals can indeed be dated to the second or third decade of the 2nd century, what do they tell us? That the writer believed in an earthly Jesus: that he was born of Mary, a virgin, was descended from David, baptized by John, crucified by Pilate, and rose in flesh. Ignatius, or the Christian writing in his name, seems in several passages to be condemning those who do not preach such a biography. The epistle to the Trallians 9:1-2 is striking:

Close your ears, then, if anyone preaches to you without speaking of Jesus Christ. Christ was of David's line. He was the son of Mary; he was truly [*alethos*] and indeed born, and ate and drank; he was truly persecuted in the days of Pontius Pilate, and truly and indeed crucified....He was also truly raised from the dead.

While the word "truly/*alethos*" has suggested to many that Ignatius is here countering a docetic view of Jesus which claimed he did not 'genuinely' undergo these things as a full-fledged human being, the word can also suggest that he is countering a view which said that these things had no historical actuality of any kind.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, William R. Schoedel (*Ignatius of Antioch*, p. 124-5) recognizes that such passages suggest that "Ignatius had in mind a denial of the passion more thoroughgoing than our argument has so far indicated." He acknowledges that what some seem to deny "is the very reality of Christ's death," and thus of the incarnation. The opposing view offers not simply a docetic Christ, it offers something which gives Christ "no place in our lives" (Magnesians 9:2).

Consider Magnesians 11:1:

I wish to warn you not to fall into the snare of stupid doctrine, but to be convinced of the birth, passion and resurrection, which took place at the time of the governorship of Pontius Pilate.

This is not an exhortation to reject a docetic interpretation of things. Schoedel admits it is "relatively anemic as an anti-docetic statement." Rather, Ignatius is making a firm declaration that such events did indeed happen. In the Trallians passage above, the bishop of Antioch wants Christians to "close their ears" to anyone who has no historical Jesus to preach, not just to the one who preaches that Jesus of Nazareth did not genuinely suffer. Why would Mary and Pilate be so prominently included as part of an anti-docetic net? Such figures would be accepted even by docetists. By way of analogy, we might say it is like two adult brothers who argue about the details of an incident which took place in their boyhood home. If one maintains that it was a flower vase they broke and the other that it was Mom's best teapot, neither one is likely to argue the fact that it all took place on Elm Street. This is an accepted part of the background, and no one would have an interest in disputing it.

On the other hand, we do find passages in Ignatius which specifically address what seems to be clearly a docetic position, but they are separate from the more sweeping arguments about the historicity of Jesus. Trallians 10, for example, follows on the passage quoted above:

It is asserted by some who deny God.. .that his sufferings were not genuine.

Or Smyrneans 5:2:

So what is the point of my standing well in the opinion of a man who blasphemes my Lord by denying that he ever bore a real human body?

In contrast to the biographical passages, these and a couple of others use docetic language; the verb "*dokein*" is used only in such contexts. Schoedel

claims that using the phrase "ate and drank" in Trallians 9 betrays an interest in docetism. Possibly so, and it would be no surprise if Ignatius fails to keep his heretical opponents rigidly separate. But it could also simply represent the idea that Jesus had 'lived'—coming between being born and being executed; it says he did the normal things real historical men do (as in Luke 17:27 [see p.352]).

Traditional scholarship, not unexpectedly, generally fails to recognize the anti-historicist element in this mix of ideas which Ignatius is railing against. To support it, can we formulate a picture of the conditions at the time which would see the various positions given to Ignatius' opponents as part of a conglomerate yet coherent situation?

The Consequences of Historicizing Jesus

Whether everyone or only some of those whom Ignatius is opposing are docetists, one must first ask how such a position arose. We have examined some features of the atmosphere in which Paul moved in the mid 1st century, features that can be labeled "proto-Gnosticism." Docetism was not among them, although this was an idea which was destined to become an integral part of some gnostic sects, namely those which adopted Jesus of Nazareth as a redeemer figure or merged him with a spiritual savior they already possessed. And yet we encounter a curious situation in the Ignatian letters. Ignatius is engaging with believers in his circle who hold docetic views of Christ. But this view is not in any context of standard (or even proto) Gnosticism. Ignatius' opponents do not expound the characteristic gnostic doctrine of a higher God existing over the creator God; if they had, Ignatius would not have remained silent on that score. They do not present Christ as a Revealer or teacher, conferring saving *gnosis*; salvation seems still to lie in Jesus' self-sacrifice. There is no sign of the concept of fallen sparks of divinity inhabiting enlightened "*gnostikoi*." Ignatius addresses none of these things as being held by his opponents. Moreover, the docetism of these opponents has arisen *within* Ignatius' own faith community. He does not treat them as outsiders; they are Christians like himself who are promoting a particular idea he cannot countenance. Of course, the other idea he cannot countenance is that Jesus Christ had not, in an historical sense, been born of Mary or crucified under Pontius Pilate. But whether it was the same group of Christians promoting both ideas, non-historicity and docetism, or whether Ignatius is facing a mix of different people expounding different ideas, remains to be decided.

Thus, such docetists do not seem to be emerging from a separate line of development which is moving into full-blown Gnosticism. This particular circle of docetism looks merely to be an innovation within the proto-orthodox Christ movement of which Ignatius is a part, one which can probably trace a general line back to the Pauline type of Christ cult half a century earlier. This creates a peculiar but intriguing picture. Docetism is almost universally associated by scholarship with Gnosticism. Even Christian heresiologists like Irenaeus and Tertullian condemned docetism in the context of condemning various gnostic sects; they saw the two as intertwined within a general heretical movement they

believed had emerged from orthodox Christianity. But in Ignatius we have an expression of docetism lacking any identifiable context of Gnosticism. The tenets of developing Gnosticism do not seem to be responsible for generating it.

Ignatius' opponents are not simply believers, they are preachers. Like the opponents in 1 and 2 John, they are being listened to by other Christians, and Ignatius adjures the latter not to do so (Eph. 7:1, Phil. 6:1). In the orthodox scenario, this would mean that the movement toward denying the physical reality of everything Christ underwent—probably denying the role of the resurrection itself since such a thing would only have been that of a phantom—would have been a staggering about-face in regard to the central kerygma of the faith, a complete rejection of almost a century of belief supposedly held by Christians of all stripes in all places. Why would there be a widespread enough acceptance of such new preaching—or at least a willingness to consider it—that Ignatius must regard it as of the greatest danger to contemporary communities and preach so virulently against it? How could we understand such a development? If based on philosophical considerations (which the docetic stance was), why did it develop only in Ignatius' time, and not earlier in the time of Paul?

Moreover, docetism as generally envisioned would have been essentially a negative movement. If we follow the usual interpretation of commentators like Schoedel, a great number of Christian preachers have coalesced in Syria and Asia Minor (at least) to preach a doctrine of denial, that Jesus Christ had *not* been real, that he had not undergone suffering, death and resurrection in genuine bodily form. Could this idea have motivated so many orthodox Christian believers to become apostles and propagate such new denials? Missionaries are rather driven by *positive* convictions, by new ideas which they perceive as being advantageous. Ignatius' opponents would be in the unenviable position of approaching people who had long believed in their faith and telling them that they were mistaken, deceived and defrauded by many decades of teaching. At the same time, they would be trying to substitute a much less appealing view, almost an insulting one, of the Jesus of Nazareth Christians had hitherto embraced. How did such preachers get past the first encounter at the prospect's doorway, much less avoid having a chamber pot thrown at their heads?

This view of docetism makes little sense. We need to look for a new alignment of the idea within early Christianity. While it became a natural part of the gnostic movement which adopted a Jesus in history under the influence of contact with proto-orthodoxy and the Gospels, it apparently was also able to arise within the cultic Christ movement descended from Paul—as one reaction to, or particular refinement of, a specific developing condition at the time of Ignatius: the emergence of an historical Jesus. Instead of regarding docetism as coming up against a long-established way of viewing Jesus, rooted firmly in an historical base and traditions no one prior to this time had questioned, we need to see the two tendencies as competing on a level playing field. They emerged more or less at the same time. Ignatius' historical Jesus who had been born of Mary and crucified by Pilate was no more entrenched than the docetic interpretation of

such a figure. The apostles expounding the latter stance were going about gaining a hearing and undoubtedly some converts, because the historical Jesus was an equally newly-developed idea, advocated by such as Ignatius in language aimed at establishing both his historical veracity and his genuine humanity. The docetists were not bucking a tradition of decades, or butting their heads against longstanding views of Jesus the man and an historical, physical crucifixion.

As long as Christians, like Paul, had propagated a divine Christ in heaven, one who had not yet set foot on earth, the issue of a corporeal form and nature, and the philosophical dilemmas this entailed, did not arise—which is why we see no sign of docetism in the 1st century. Once he was claimed to be historical, acting on earth, some had to resist by advocating that, even if so, he was only *seemingly* a physical man. One can also envision that there may have been others who, facing the dilemma of a god taking on material flesh, resisted placing him on earth at all, denying that he had been here in any form.

Thus, we see the dispute in 1 John against those who denied that he had "come in the flesh" (4:3), and a little later, Ignatius' adamant denunciation of docetism and his claims for a fleshly historicity of Christ with basic biographical details. In this light, we must probably assume that he is addressing two different groups or messages, since a denial of historicity would have set aside any need for docetism. Two groups is not inherently unlikely. Scholars themselves are faced with a similar conundrum as to whether Ignatius' opponents were multiple, both docetists and Judaizers (the latter, for example, in Magnesians 8-10), since condemnation of both types of view are found in the epistles, with no clear indication of whether they represent parts of one 'heretical' group or two.

Ignatius' claims to Jesus' historicity and fleshly reality, it has to be stressed, are not backed by appeals to documents or oral traditions, or by any sense that they are longstanding views held in the community. Not even the bishops and other clergy are said to hold the correct view on the basis of links to past teaching or past orthodoxy. Ignatius never makes the argument that 'we have believed these things about Jesus for generations' much less that they were written down. He does not say that 'the apostles knew Jesus in the flesh and have passed on undeniable traditions about him.' The docetists are never accused of overturning established tradition, of trying to shove the Christian train into reverse. Rather, they are simply "mad dogs" (Eph. 7:1), "false-hearted wolves" (Phil. 2:2), and "beasts in the form of men" (Sm. 4:1). Ignatius' truth is not time-honored, it is a new one of necessity. His argument is that the historical position is so because it *needs* to be so. Without a Jesus in flesh, he maintains, our sufferings are pointless. That is the extent of his pleading a case for historical veracity and the legitimacy of his position over that of his opponents.

The confusion about opposing groups, the mix of motifs found in Ignatius' admonitions, the sense of a level playing-field: this picture is most easily explained by adopting the view that at the beginning of the 2nd century the wide and varied 'Christian' salvation movement was a cauldron of different ideas, a competing variety in a state of flux. Some of it was moving toward a coalescing

orthodoxy in bringing the spiritual Christ to earth and appropriating the Jewish heritage, other parts were moving toward a Gnosticism that rejected the world of flesh and regarded the Jewish Deity as a subordinate, evil god who was responsible for the hated world of matter; those among them who possessed or adopted a Jesus were anxious to keep him isolated from that world. None of it was grounded in a genuine historical figure or set of events in the recent past. In Ignatius' own circles, which seem to have extended across Asia Minor, a range of voices were raised with different ideas and ways of looking at such saviors and salvation. If we are not to relate those particular docetists with Gnosticism, it is probably the case that they simply died out within their own circles as orthodoxy advanced, overwhelmed by the way of thinking which Ignatius held.

Finally, where did Ignatius, or the person writing in his name, get Jesus' biographical data? I have postulated that it may ultimately proceed from Mark, that a Gospel written two or three decades earlier in a community not too far distant in Syria or Galilee, a story not originally intended to reflect historical reality, may have produced a gradual 'leakage' of Gospel ideas and events which Ignatius and other Christians of the region were exposed to. (If the Ignatian epistles were written as late as the 120s, the immediate leakage may have come from the newer Gospel of Matthew.) Many people could have found these ideas appealing, adopting them with an increasing conviction of their reality. Perhaps this adoption was further encouraged by a related trend toward historicizing the spiritual Christ, one not specifically generated by the Gospels.

That Ignatius knew any written Gospel is dubious, virtually to be ruled out. He never appeals to one in support of his claims about Jesus. His reference to "the gospel" is clearly to the preached message, as in Paul. As in the case of other Apostolic Fathers, most scholars judge that he draws only on (presumed) oral traditions. Many episodes in the Gospel story could have demonstrated the 'humanity' of Jesus. Ignatius' concern over the authority of appointed clergy in the Christian communities could have been supported by accounts of Jesus' appointment of apostles, or the concept of apostolic succession and tradition. He makes no such appeals. In his condemnation of "Judaizing" elements in the community, he never throws out an accusation that the Jews had been instrumental in the killing of Jesus. He never draws on the idea that anything has been passed along from earlier generations of apostles, that anything goes back to Jesus himself. There is never an appeal to any sayings of Jesus, any eschatological predictions, any miracles—although, as always, scholars manage to find unattributed "echoes" of some sayings. And for all his fixation on Jesus' human sufferings, paralleled by his own, he never once offers details of those sufferings such as are recounted so vividly in the Gospels.¹¹⁰

If Ignatius had no written Gospel, and never identifies circulating oral or apostolic traditions about Jesus' ministry and passion, the orthodox scenario faces an astonishing situation. The bishop of Antioch, living in the foremost Christian center in the eastern Mediterranean, almost on the outskirts of Galilee and Judea, seemingly has no access to knowledge about Jesus' life, ministry and

death beyond the basic biographical data he puts forward. He never alludes to features of early Christian history surrounding the apostles, save the bare names of Peter and Paul (Romans 4:3); as noted earlier, he does not even make reference to their martyrdom, a key issue for Ignatius since he is facing it himself and is eager to embrace it. (Or the subsequent forger is using Ignatius as a mouthpiece for the advocacy of Christian willingness to face martyrdom.) Of earlier Christian documents, he shows a familiarity with 1 Corinthians and possibly one or two other Pauline epistles and Hebrews.

Almost a century after the reputed crucifixion, this is the state of knowledge in this area about the seminal figure and events of the Christian movement. It casts serious doubt upon the almost universal consensus (based on no concrete evidence) that Mark was written around 70, and the rest of the Gospels—and Acts—by the year 100. Rather, the picture created by Ignatius fits consistently with the slow-developing, fragmented condition we see in earliest Christianity, the limited contacts between communities, the lack of doctrinal agreement among them, the puzzling anomalies, the perplexing variety of ideas, and the vast silence on the Gospel story which the murky first hundred years presents.

From Mythical to Historical

Dissenters to Jesus mythicism sometimes ask, where is the witness to the changeover *on the ground* from belief in a spiritual heavenly Christ to belief in an historical Jesus? And why do the heresiologists of the mid to late 2nd century, Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, not address and condemn belief in an exclusively heavenly Christ, a 'no historical Jesus' heresy? As to the first question, the Ignatian epistles and possibly the Johannine epistles a little earlier, testify to that changeover; and they also, when examined within the wider documentary record surrounding them, testify to the fact that it did not happen overnight. It was a gradual, piecemeal development, meeting occasional resistance and compromise and requiring a period of transition. (The latter is best represented by the epistle of Barnabas, datable at the same time or a little later than Ignatius, but from a different area of the empire, probably Egypt: see chapter 30.) A somewhat different kind of transition extended even into the latter part of the 2nd century among the apologists, as will be seen in Chapter 31.

As to the second question, by the time of the great heresiologists like Irenaeus, writing in the last quarter of the 2nd century and beyond, the cultic Christ of Paul had universally passed into the historical Jesus of the Gospels, and earlier documents reflecting the former were being consistently reinterpreted in terms of the latter. Being no longer an existing force, the heresiologists would have had no reason to address it; they and the Christian community would have lost sight of it. Justin Martyr comes a little earlier, but even by then the Gospels were gaining ascendancy and Justin himself in his anti-heresy writing seems to have focused entirely on the prominent threat in Marcion, who held to a docetic historical Jesus, employing a form of the Gospel of Luke. We have, moreover, lost all of Justin's anti-heresy works.

The Transition of Jesus in Ignatius

Despite his championing of the new historical Jesus born of Mary and crucified under Pilate, Ignatius betrays his roots in the purely spiritual Christ of the Pauline-type movement which preceded him. He is standing on that threshold of transition, with a foot in both camps. Ironically, those advocating the docetic position were being more 'orthodox' than Ignatius, for Paul had located Christ in a spiritual realm. Keeping him in a spiritual state, even if on earth, was what the docetists were intent on doing. Ignatius, like Paul, regarded Christ as pre-existent, "with the Father from all eternity" (Mag. 6:1), probably of a subordinate nature, being an emanation of God. Elevation of Jesus to absolute equality and identical substance with the Father, as in the Trinity, would not arrive until later.

Both the pre-existence and the blatant identification of Jesus *as God* are considerably loftier than the portrayal of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels. Rather than see this as an evolution beyond the Gospel picture, it actually reflects the earlier Pauline Christ, who was seen as a transcendent divine entity. The Gospel Jesus, though syncretized with the cultic Christ, was essentially derived from the Galilean kingdom movement (which produced Q), from the perception of a teaching prophet and wisdom sage, and the expectation of the apocalyptic Son of Man. Ignatius' roots lie with the former, onto which he has grafted the human conception, perhaps from echoes of Mark. The Synoptics, coming from a more mundane direction, have not yet caught up to Ignatius' own world in which a pre-existent Christ is full deity because he began that way.

In a few passages Ignatius betrays the mythical Christ atmosphere which lies in his immediate background. Ephesians 19, which may reflect an existing hymn containing a cosmic myth similar to the pre-Pauline christological hymns, reveals a previous phase of the faith before an historical Jesus was introduced. Three mystical features, the virginity of Jesus' mother, her conception, and the death of the Lord, are said to be hidden from "the prince/ruler of this age" (*ton archonta tou aionos ton ton*). This is the singular equivalent to Paul's "the rulers of this age" and clearly refers to Satan, which ought to confirm a demonic meaning in Paul. The reference also mirrors Paul's motif about things hidden from the understanding of these evil spirit powers. Moreover, these three things are said to have been "*brought to pass* in the deep silence of God." They happened not on earth or in history, or in the sight of all the world, but in God's "deep silence," conveying a sense of the heavenly dimension where God's spiritual processes are unfolded. This has a parallel in Paul's "hidden wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 2:7).

The passage speaks of these "secrets" being "manifested to the *aidsin*" which can mean "aeons" in the sense of supernatural beings which inhabit the celestial spheres. These events, including Jesus' conception and death, are said to have been manifested not in history or on earth, but in a mystical heavenly scene involving the appearance of a new "star" at which the other heavenly bodies express wonder. This star brings about the crumbling of magic, sorcery and superstition, the vanishing of evil and ignorance and the destruction of the old order, "for God was manifested [the verb *phanerod*] in the *likeness* of men to

bring about a new eternal life." The "star" no doubt represents God's emanation the Son, a new supernatural aeon operating as the agent of salvation, effected entirely in a heavenly setting. (Some scholars have attempted to see this myth as referring only to God's "preparation" for the Jesus event on earth, but the effects the 'star' brings about have happened—they were "brought to pass"—and they can only have come as a *result* of the event already having taken place.)

In view of the overriding mythological atmosphere throughout the passage (which Schoedel has acknowledged), we may reasonably presume that in the opening sentence the identification of the "virgin" as "Mary" (something Paul never provided) was imposed on the original hymn, perhaps by Ignatius himself, reflecting the new historicist view of Jesus' human birth. We may also presume (like Schoedel) that the virgin birth of the child was, for the original formulators of the hymn, inspired by Isaiah 7:14 and not by any birth traditions of an historical Jesus. This "myth" in Ephesians 19, then, is a hold-over from the pre-historical Jesus phase of the Ignatian community.¹¹¹

Ignatius also witnesses to an inseparability of God and Christ which does not properly fit his idea of Jesus as a recent man, a distinct personality on earth who had given rise to the faith. For Ignatius, Jesus could be said to be "theocentric." God himself is present and acting—and experiencing—in and through Jesus. This is one way of describing an emanation of God, ultimately grounded in the Logos, which (as in Philo) is essentially an abstract force given off by God: his thought, power, image. In Ephesians 18:3, "God was now appearing in human form" defines Jesus as God himself taking on human nature. In Magnesians 8:2, God has "manifested himself through Jesus Christ his son who is his Word proceeding from silence." Schoedel (*op.cit.*, p.20) acknowledges that Ignatius shows an "undifferentiated... sense of the divinity of Christ." In other words, he lacks the sense of Christ as a fully distinct entity, or he is reflecting an earlier (and probably not too much earlier) form of expression which lacked a sense of distinctiveness that would be expected to accompany incarnation.¹¹²

This close identification of Jesus with God, a degree of integration which sees God as manifesting himself and undergoing suffering through Jesus, is an indicator that the faith began, not with a man who gave rise to a belief that he was a Son and part of God, but with a Godhead that came to be seen, through philosophical meditation, as containing an emanative, intermediary element. This heavenly Son became increasingly regarded as having entered the world of flesh, eventually to take on full human nature and live an earthly life. But the highly elevated nature of this Son, compared to the paucity of information and historical connections in regard to his perceived incarnation, strongly suggests that he began as the former and not the latter. We are brought back to Paul's mode of expression, his starting point in a Jesus who is a transcendent heavenly being never identified as a specific historical man. Ignatius betrays the same way of thinking, the same starting point; but now a new dimension, still opaque and with few details attached, has been introduced.

The Christian Jesus had "*alethos*" arrived on earth.

II : THE GALILEAN TRADITION

Between Galilee and Jerusalem lies a distance of 75 miles, or 120 kilometers. Not far for an itinerant prophet and sage to travel, especially if accompanied by a group of his followers. The journey could be made comfortably in a few days. But in all the literature of the Jerusalem Tradition no record can be found of its Jesus figure making that short journey. Before the Gospels were adopted as history, no record exists that he was ever in the city of Jerusalem at all—or anywhere else on earth.

The second division of this book makes that journey of 75 miles, but in the reverse direction. It will travel to Galilee to look at the record of a movement that was preaching the coming kingdom of God. An important part of this record lies in the ancient lost document now known as "Q" which has been extracted by modern scholars from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. At the time when the Q collection of sayings and anecdotes was incorporated by the two later evangelists into their reworking of the Gospel of Mark, references to a figure who was represented as the originator of the sayings, as a miracle worker and apocalyptic prophet, could be found within that Q collection. Whether this figure was given the name Jesus is impossible to say. But Q itself had undergone an evolution. It can be shown to contain layers of different material which seem to have been added to the collection over time, and thus we can presume that the document went through a number of revisions. Working back through those revisions, identifying the nature and sources of Q's various components, and deciding whether in fact a Jesus figure under any name lay at the roots of Q's evolution, will be the principal task of this division of the book.

One thing is evident even before the excavation starts. As with the literature of the Jerusalem Tradition, a survey of Q as reconstructed by modern scholarship reveals no evidence that the 75 mile journey from Galilee to Jerusalem was ever made by the Q Jesus. No mention of Jerusalem, no death and resurrection, no redemptive role for the teaching sage can be found in Q. More than that, some of the sayings strongly suggest, as in the epistles, that no room can be made for him in the early strata.

Part Seven will begin in Chapter 22 by looking at the nature of Q and making a case for its existence and the lack of viability in alternate theories. Chapter 23 will sort Q into its various layers of material, noting the great differences between them, along with the lack of anything to do with elements of the Jerusalem Tradition. A possible source of its early material will be uncovered. The question will be asked: was a Jesus figure present in the earliest stages of the

community's development? Chapter 24 will shift the focus to the Gospel of Thomas, another collection of sayings attributed to Jesus which has no reference to a death and resurrection. Parts of Thomas have some connection to the earliest stratum of Q, and they will serve to help analyze Q itself.

Part Eight will continue with the study of Q and its development of an originating figure. Chapter 25 will suggest a different 'founder' for the kingdom preaching movement and make a case for regarding the presence of a Jesus in the final version of Q as the product of a late stage of revision. Chapter 26 will offer sectarian needs and impulses as the reasons for such an invention. Chapter 27 is the pivot point of the book, the fulcrum on which the entire history of Christianity swings. Here the Gospel of Mark will be presented as the ultimate evolution of the kingdom-preaching tradition, and the shadowy figure of Mark himself as the orchestrator of a master stroke: the integration of the newly-minted Q founder with the divine Son preached by Paul, creating a symbolic tale about a ministry in Galilee and a death and resurrection in Jerusalem. The allegorical nature of this first Gospel and the purpose which Mark may have had in mind will be examined.

Part Seven

PREACHING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

22

The Nature and Existence of Q

Teacher of a radical new ethic. Miracle-worker and healer. Prophet of the kingdom. The story of the death and resurrection in the Gospels is preceded by the tale of a ministry, the career of a man who was all these things and more. Do the two belong together? Would a Galilean preacher of the kingdom go off to Jerusalem and get himself executed, only to be turned into the cosmic Son of God, creator and sustainer of the universe, redeemer of the world's sins, emerging alive from his grave and promising to come again at the end of the world to judge it in apocalyptic glory? How would such a progression, such an astonishing quantum leap, have taken place? Who would have done it? Who would have accepted it?

Do the two belong together?

Our study of the epistles and the kerygma of death and resurrection they represent has strongly suggested that the two do *not* belong together, for in that record there is no sign of the pre-passion ministry of the Gospels, no life on earth. If, when we move to the other side of the picture we find a corresponding silence in the opposite direction, this will solidify the unbridgeable divide between the two Traditions.

However, the situation is not quite so straightforward when we try to identify and assemble the pieces of the Galilean side of the puzzle. We do not have as clear and concrete a record for the early kingdom movement as we do for the Son of God movement. No Paul of Tarsus left his name and writings to be examined first-hand. No collection of documents like the epistles which open windows onto the varied 1st century faith in a divine Son was brought together for the kingdom movement. With one exception—the Gospel of Thomas, recently unearthed from the sands of Egypt—the record from the Galilean side comes from the New Testament Gospels themselves and must be extracted from them through a process of excavation and distillation.

The names of the four Gospels are no longer considered to reflect the authors who actually wrote them. The assigning of the Gospels to legendary early figures of the Christian movement was a product of the later 2nd century, and critical

scholarship regards such traditions as inaccurate. However, the Gospels are still known by their traditional names. Such names are used to refer to the Gospels themselves or to their authors, whoever they may have been.

A cornerstone in the structure which modern majority scholarship has erected to explain the relationship between the canonical Gospels is the conclusion that Mark was the first one written, and that Matthew and Luke came later and independently created their own Gospels by copying and reworking Mark. In addition to their use of Mark, the Gospels of Matthew and Luke contain material not found in Mark, and much of this material is very similar, often almost identical in wording between the two. The best explanation for this commonality is that both drew on another source document which they integrated into their reworkings of Mark. (This picture is referred to as the "Two-Source Hypothesis" or "Two-Document Hypothesis.") This hypothetical source document (no copy has survived) scholars call "Q," for the German *Quelle*, meaning "source." What it may have been called in the 1st century, or if it was referred to as a "gospel," is impossible to say.

The community which produced this document is called the "Q community," but again, this is a modern designation; nor does it necessarily refer to a single community in a single center. However, what we can conclude is that all three Synoptic Gospels—Mark, Matthew and Luke—were written in communities that were at later stages of evolution within the movement which produced Q; that movement, for want of a better name, can be called the preaching of the kingdom of God, or simply the "kingdom movement." It encompassed a network of communities in the northern part of the Levant, spread variously throughout Galilee and Syria. Whereas in earlier generations scholarship tended to scatter the four Gospels to various points of the empire's compass (such as Mark in Rome), this is no longer considered a sensible distribution. All three Synoptics are now commonly seen as coming from different places in the Levant district, although none can be assigned to a specific location. Since all three reflect the same ethos and features in regard to their preaching content, we can assume that their communities were in relatively close proximity to each other, allowing knowledge of the first Gospel to eventually spread to other communities, leading to its revision and enlargement.¹¹³

The Priority of Mark

While the priority of Mark is almost universally accepted today, we can briefly look at the basis for this acceptance. Mark is the shortest Gospel and presents the most primitive content of all four. As a general rule, when two documents are similar in content and layout, and one is longer than the other, the longer one tends to be an expansion of the shorter. Matthew and Luke are considerably longer than Mark, and both seem to follow Mark's layout and content. The standard (and virtually only) alternative to the priority of Mark has been the priority of Matthew (a suggestion going back two centuries to the "Griesbach hypothesis"), although very few hold to such an idea today.

In such a case, one would have to provide a reasonable explanation for why Mark, if he is writing later and using one or both of the other Synoptics as his source, has cut out so much. He has stripped away the genealogies and nativity stories, gutted the Temptation scene, discarded the bulk of the teachings—including almost all the parables, as well as the most prized of Christian ethics such as those in Matthew's Sermon on the Mount. He has excised many of Matthew's details surrounding the crucifixion, the guard at the tomb, the post-resurrection appearances, the "preach to all nations" directive (Mt. 28:19) and much else. A convincing rationale for this sort of drastic reduction, along with a feasible setting in which it could have taken place, has yet to be put forward.

Matthew is also more theologically developed than Mark, showing greater sophistication in its soteriology and titles for Jesus. The Matthean and Lukan grammar is an improvement over that of Mark, and Markan passages compared to the other two often contain a "harder" reading; that is, Mark's versions entail problems which Luke and Matthew have evidently 'smoothed out.'

The strongest weapon in the arsenal of those who would reject the priority of Mark is the so-called "minor agreements" between Matthew and Luke. When all three Synoptics present the same saying or incident, it is sometimes the case that Matthew and Luke will have similar or identical wording, whereas Mark will differ from them both. This, it is claimed, shows that copying must have taken place between Matthew and Luke, rather than either or both of them from Mark.

But there are reasonable explanations available for this phenomenon. Helmut Koester (*Ancient Christian Gospels*, p. 175) suggests that subsequent alteration of the text of Mark may account for it no longer showing an agreement with the other two. Or, later scribes may have altered Luke's wording to agree with Matthew's (a common occurrence in ancient manuscript reproduction). And so on. Measured against the arguments in favor of Markan priority, something like the minor agreements do not have an overwhelming weight, and the alternatives inevitably face their own, even greater, difficulties. As Koester says (*op.cit.*, p. 130), "the rejection of the two-source hypothesis solves nothing and creates new riddles for which even more complex and more improbable hypotheses have to be proposed." (Koester's comment applied to the rejection of Q as well, and the question of "minor agreements" will be revisited in application to Q.)

Matthew was the most popular Gospel in antiquity, and the earliest, as far as we can tell, to gain dissemination in the wider Christian world. Consequently, the Church traditionally regarded it as the first Gospel written. And since it was an appealing improvement over Mark and contained so much more teaching material than did the first Gospel, the eclipse of the Markan version, left behind near the starting gate, can be easily understood. We must also keep in mind that the earliest versions of all of the Gospels are lost to us, as the surviving canonical versions are increasingly seen as representing degrees of revision and evolution beyond their original autographs. There is a century and more separating extant manuscripts from those autographs, and while it can sometimes be seen from quotations in the Fathers and apologists that the canonicals contain changes

made to the versions of the earlier writers, that insight is very limited. It is especially within the period of a sect's formation and early development that its ideas and the writings embodying them are most fluid, and without surviving manuscripts attesting to the earliest phases, it would be foolhardy to contend that the canonicals give us a clear window onto the original versions of the Gospels.

Of course, the most important aspect in the demonstration of Mark as the first Gospel and its revision by Matthew and Luke—and to some extent by John—is the fact that this reveals the four Gospels not as independent witnesses to the life of Jesus, but as a chain of literary works dependent on the first one written, essentially giving us a single account of the life of Jesus.

The Q Document

Even though there is no independent evidence for Q, such as an identifying reference to it in the ancient record,¹¹⁴ majority scholarship's deduction that such a document did exist and was used by Matthew and Luke best accounts for that common material which they do not have from Mark. Some scholars have put forward other theories, such as that Luke copied material from Matthew which Matthew had himself created or derived from other sources. Such theories would deny that any Q document existed at all. However, the arguments in favor of the existence of Q are much stronger than those against it or in favor of some other explanation, and an examination of this question will now be undertaken. But first, a basic description of Q as scholars have reconstructed it.

The exact extent of Q is still a matter of debate, but its main content has been reasonably well established. For the most part, Q was made up of a collection of sayings. Most apparently lacked any lead-in sentences or descriptive material that would place such sayings within a ministry of Jesus, or even attribute them to him; this can be assumed because in the vast majority of cases, Matthew and Luke use the sayings quite differently, placing them in different spots in their Gospel story and within different immediate contexts. In Q, such sayings were grouped into clusters of related topics. Sprinkled throughout were a few more extended pieces: miracle and controversy stories, the dialogue between Jesus and John, the Temptation of Jesus. There was no overall pattern which would reflect the course of Jesus' ministry or any other historical governing factor, with the exception that a description of John the Baptist's ministry comes first.

When Matthew and Luke share a saying or anecdote with a similar wording, it is likely they are drawing on the same written source, and such units can be confidently included within the Q document. Precisely identical wording is rare, but this can be put down to little changes made by one or both evangelists reflecting their own writing styles or fitting their individual editorial and theological agendas. These changes are often consistent with the changes apparent in their adaptations of Mark. When a wider discrepancy exists between sayings that seem similar, there may be some doubt whether they are to be included in Q. In this case, both evangelists may be drawing on some non-literary source, or perhaps two different literary versions of Q.

Assuming that Matthew and Luke used copies of Q which, if not identical, provided a generally common sequence and content, which evangelist is seen as better reflecting the original Q order of the sayings? Both present a different distribution of Q's pieces throughout their own Gospels. But since Matthew's pieces are worked into a structure which is clearly designed to fit his personal outlook, scholars have judged that Luke better preserves the Q order, and so they list Q in the Lukan sequence, assigning it the chapter and verse numbers of the Lukan Gospel. Thus, Luke 3:7-9, the presumed first unit in the Q document, becomes Q 3:7-9. (Note that the reconstructed Q, therefore, does not use all possible numbers, but only those derived from Luke.)

Layers Within Q

Once the elements comprising Q were identified and mapped out, it became evident that Q included different kinds of material. Two broad types are obvious. The first is found in several clusters of sayings with a common atmosphere, style and purpose. They focus on ethics and discipleship and closely resemble the genre of Jewish "wisdom" collections, as in the Book of Proverbs, attributed to Solomon. There were pagan collections as well, such as that attributed to the 6th century BCE Solon of Athens. (Attributions of both were generally legendary.) Such collections offered sage advice on how to survive the vicissitudes of existence, be successful in life, and relate to divine forces in the universe. Such advice might be aimed at the governing class or the common person.

The wisdom sayings in Q, though somewhat different in character from the general type, include the famous Beatitudes, several pithy sayings and parables, along with some of the most prized of the Gospel ethics—none less so than the lines spoken by Jesus in Luke/Q 6:27-28:

"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To him who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from him who takes away your cloak do not withhold your coat as well." [RSV]

Scholars refer to this as the wisdom or "sapiential" layer of Q. The second type, again in clusters, stands side by side with the first, but the atmosphere and sentiments of these sayings are as different from the others as night and day.

"Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to hell!" [Lk./Q 10:13-15, RSV]

Such sayings contain none of the wisdom quality, but instead are "prophetic" in nature, even apocalyptic. They condemn the outside world for its hostility and rejection, they look to a future upheaval and accounting. The figure of the Son of Man appears in several sayings, one who shall arrive at the End-time to judge the world. (This figure is ultimately derived from the apocalyptic scene in Daniel 7, as discussed in chapter 5.) Here, too, we encounter John the Baptist, styled as a

forerunner to the Q preachers, prophesying a great retribution at the hands of a coming one who will baptize with fire. He seems to be speaking of the coming Son of Man and not a human figure already on earth. Also in this group are the two miracle stories in Q: the healing of the centurion's servant (Luke/Q 7:1-10), and the Beelzebul controversy (Luke/Q 11:14-20).

How are we to relate two such vastly different groups of sayings and anecdotes? Could they have come from the same man, or even the same community? The wisdom sayings are tolerant, often enlightened (whether or not they are always practicable). They possess insight and even touches of humor; they embrace a world one is attempting to peaceably change and find a place within. The prophetic material, on the other hand, tends to be narrow-minded, fulminating, world-denying; its speakers look for no compromise with those who have failed to heed them.

It seemed to modern liberal scholars that both types could not be assigned to a single source, that they may not even have been contemporary in time. Led by an influential Canadian scholar named John Kloppenborg (*The Formation of Q*, 1987), they identified the wisdom sayings in Q as comprising a separate stratum of material and labeled it Q1. These were assigned to the earliest stage of the document and judged by some (such as the Jesus Seminar) to be essentially the product of the "genuine" historical Jesus and the early community. The prophetic stratum was labeled Q2 and assigned to a later stage, when new sayings were incorporated into the document reflecting the preaching community's reaction to their failure to win over wider segments of society. These sayings were, again by some, seen as unrelated to sentiments expressed by the earlier 'genuine' Jesus and judged not to have been his product. The odd saying within Q2 has been regarded as possibly authentic to Jesus, such as the Beelzebul controversy and criticism of the Pharisees. The addition of the Q2 sayings to the Q1 sayings, possibly with some reorganization and "redaction" (changes or additions that reflect the interests of the editor), was performed at an unknown time.

This left a few elements in Q which appear to represent a further advance on both earlier stages, such as the Temptation Story (Q 4:1-13) and the saying about the Son who knows the Father (Q 10:22). These went into a Q3 stratum seen as reflecting more advanced thinking about Jesus, showing stirrings of a biography and even giving him a touch of divinity. Scholars may differ on exactly which units they allot to a Q3, and occasionally there will be disagreement over the choice of Q1 or Q2 for a given saying. Again, further redaction was probably performed on the collection as a whole when later insertions were made.

Note that the designations Q1, Q2, Q3 do not represent separate documents, but indicate different strata of material within the reconstructed totality of Q used by Matthew and Luke. Such designations also refer to the surmised state of the document at each of those stages of development, although this must be seen as the simplification of a reality in which numerous little additions and revisions were no doubt made to the document between a couple of extensive overhauls, over a period which may have been a few decades.

The Existence of Q

Having gained an overall picture of our hypothetical Q document, we can digress to consider the very question of whether it actually existed or not, or whether another explanation is viable for the common material in Matthew and Luke. For those readers who are familiar with this debate and accept the existence of Q, the remainder of this chapter may be passed over. (Some of the verses discussed here will be more thoroughly examined in later chapters.)

No one will deny that within the material in Matthew and Luke which they have not taken from Mark a great deal of it is extremely similar, as though both are drawing on another literary source. In most cases, the similarities are too close to be put down to a common drawing on oral tradition. If the existence of a separate written document is to be denied, some other explanation must be offered for this common material. The most frequent suggestion is that Matthew himself wrote this extra material, and that Luke used Matthew's Gospel and copied it from him. (This hypothesis exists within the context of Markan priority; i.e., that both Matthew and Luke used Mark.) Scholars who have advocated this position include A. M. Farer in the 1950s, Michael Goulder in the 1970s (John Shelby Spong in the 1990s drew on Goulder), and most recently Mark Goodacre.

Before looking at individual points on both sides of this debate, one should consider its underlying nature. Too much stress is laid on the claim that in a choice between two scenarios—one, that Matthew used Mark and that Luke used both Mark and Matthew, or two, that Matthew and Luke used Mark and that they both used a document that is no longer extant, namely Q—the first is preferable and innately superior because it postulates one less entity, the hypothetical Q. This is tantamount to declaring that Occam's Razor should decide the day, or at least that it should be an automatic tie-breaker. But this is by no means a reliable logical inference, and especially when applied to one given case. It would be like a prosecuting attorney declaring the defendant guilty of the murder, dismissing the defense's claim that a third party was the culprit on the grounds that the latter is introducing an extra entity. Rather, the case needs to be decided on the basis of the relative weight of evidence and the degree of believability which both attorneys are able to achieve.

Related to this is the commonly expressed reluctance to consider that there is any viability *per se* in a document which is only "hypothetical." But historical research is full of hypotheticals, and especially not excluding the field of New Testament study. If the Gospel of Mark had not survived, and we had to deal with that commonality of passages in Matthew and Luke taken from him, the accurate explanation would indeed be that they both drew from a "hypothetical" document, and not that Matthew had taken them from Luke or vice-versa.

It should, therefore, not be a case of arguing that "Q is unnecessary." Nor should it be a case of "if Q is theoretically unnecessary, we need to apply our efforts to creating and arguing an alternative." It is a case of which scenario has the most compelling and explanatory effect and which is the least problematic. On both of these scores, Q wins handily—which is why the great majority of

scholars subscribe to it. (Nor does this serve any theological self-interest; quite the opposite. One of the 'problems' always attendant on Q, and one of the arguments used against it in preceding generations, was that it was surely to be considered impossible that any Christian document recording words and deeds of Jesus could exist which failed to refer in any way to his death and resurrection, a void clearly in evidence in the reconstructed Q.)

Another general point to be made is that much of the no-Q position requires defense as to why such-and-such a feature of the position seems to go against a natural conclusion that Luke was *not* using Matthew. One attempted rejoinder is that Luke was not "copying" Matthew but composing his own Gospel using Matthew as a source, and thus changes were a part of that process. But this leads one into the dubious position of saying that Luke 'used' Matthew by changing almost everything he said. If we knew for a fact that Luke used Matthew, and then were forced to explain why so little in Luke seems to reflect an obvious use of Matthew, the exercise might have some validity. But when the conclusion *sought* is the Lukan use of Matthew, yet we must reach it through a host of suggested explanations (as we shall see) for why so little in Luke shows good *sign* of using Matthew, there is surely some logical deficiency present. Nor, as a parallel, can one appeal to Luke's use of Mark in which Luke made significant changes to Mark, for those changes are still quite evident; Luke has not altered virtually everything in Mark so that an obvious derivation from him is lost.

Studies on the "Synoptic Problem" have addressed the difficulties inherent in the no-Q position. Here I will draw on a few such discussions, including "On Dispensing with Q?: Goodacre on the Relation of Luke to Matthew" by John Kloppenborg, a review of Mark Goodacre's book *The Case Against Q*.¹⁵ "2DH" (Two-Document Hypothesis) refers to the position that Matthew and Luke both used Mark and Q. "MwQH" (Mark without Q Hypothesis, which I will shorten to MwQ) is the position that Luke used both Mark and Matthew. (My remarks do not follow Kloppenborg's order and contain others' observations, including my own. All references to Kloppenborg refer to the above cited article.)

(1) One general principle is that the common material—otherwise assigned to Q—never appears in the same context in Luke as it does in Matthew. As noted earlier, the vast majority of this common material constitutes simple sayings. Luke never inserts these in a context also drawn from Matthew; nor does he ever introduce them with lead-in lines similar to Matthew's. In a handful of more extended anecdotes (such as the Dialogue between Jesus and John), which in the Q hypothesis are indicative of a layer of Q redaction, the body of each anecdote is similar, but again, the setting into which they are placed is different. If Luke is copying all these elements from Matthew, it is strange that he never once borrows any feature of Matthew's contexts as well.

In a related observation, Luke would have broken up Matthew's Sermon on the Mount, placing only part of it in his own Sermon on the Plain while distributing the remainder piecemeal throughout the rest of his Gospel in many different associations. In fact, the Sermon in Matthew is part of his arrangement

of Jesus' teaching material into (five) carefully organized blocks, whereas in Luke it is broken up into more disjointed pieces, and notably not in Matthew's order. If Luke were using Matthew, this rearrangement would not only show that Matthew's layout had no effect on Luke (perhaps he did not detect it, although Kloppenborg is not sympathetic to this suggestion), Luke has substituted for it a distribution which has no overall governing principle of its own."⁶

There is a notable inconsistency in relation to this piecemeal distribution: When Luke copies the material from Mark, he carefully maintains the order of his source, but when he is presumably copying the extra sayings material from Matthew he radically mixes up its order. This different approach between the two evangelists in the order of their common (Q) material is best explained by seeing Matthew as the one who has rearranged it from the common source to create his own organized blocks, whereas Luke has more closely followed the original order of that less organized source.

To put the question of order another way, when Matthew and Luke agree in their sequence, it is always when they both agree with Mark; the explanation being that they have both derived their common sequence from Mark. But in that material which is common only to themselves, they never agree in its sequence. This would seem to be a somewhat schizophrenic approach to sources on Luke's part and would indicate that he is not copying from Matthew.

Kloppenborg is of the opinion that Goodacre's explanations for the supposed break-up of Matthew's material are faulty. The suggestion that Luke had already adapted Mark before making use of Matthew may be feasible but it is also unprovable; and that this would necessitate an insertion of Matthew's material in a piecemeal fashion would not explain why Luke failed to put those pieces into the same Markan contexts as Matthew did, or why he consistently disengaged Matthean pieces from their Matthean contexts; some of these displacements make no perceivable sense (Kloppenborg, p.232-3). Luke not only consistently changed the geographical setting for such pieces, he also changed the audiences for them. Another explanation, that Luke preferred short speech units is belied by a couple of Lukan blocks Kloppenborg points to which are even larger than the Sermon on the Mount. The third, that the latter part of Matthew's Sermon is a 'rag bag' of miscellaneous bits and pieces, is a view many scholars have not shared, pointing out organizing structural features to it.

Kloppenborg also points out that Goodacre often uses arguments to justify one feature of Luke's use of Matthew which fail to apply, or are contradicted, in other cases. (If someone excused himself from the opera by saying he didn't like loud noise, he could hardly justify going off to a rock concert.)

(2) Luke seems ignorant of Matthew's modifications ('redactional changes') to Mark. For example, in taking Mark's scene of 4:10f in which the disciples are given insight into why Jesus speaks in parables which some will not understand, Matthew adds (13:14-15) a quotation from Isaiah illustrating the point Jesus has just made. If he is drawing on Matthew, Luke has inexplicably failed to take over that explanatory quotation.

A much more arresting example is found in regard to Matthew 16:13-20, in the famous scene when Jesus asks his disciples "Who do men think that I am?" Mark, followed by Matthew and Luke, provide Peter's answer: that Jesus is the Christ. But Matthew has added three verses (17-19) in which Jesus heaps praise on Peter and pronounces him to be the "rock" on which the church shall be built; he will receive the keys to the kingdom of heaven with power to bind and loose in both heaven and earth. This powerful Matthean endorsement of Peter by Jesus does not appear in Luke's scene, and there seems no good reason why Luke should have decided to ignore it when drawing on Matthew.

Goodacre's explanation illustrates the difficulties which the 'Luke used Matthew' scenario must face, and the weakness of some of its defense measures. As Kloppenborg puts it,

Goodacre invokes Farrer's notion of elements of Matthew being 'Luke pleasing.' Thus Luke omitted some elements of Matthew because they were not 'Luke pleasing.' This is a principle of exceedingly dubious merit. 'Luke pleasing' words are simply words that Luke has in common with Matthew.

In other words, this is a case of providing a definition for something which serves the purpose of supporting the desired interpretation, a circular device. What is needed is confirmation of that definition by providing principles determining what pleased and did not please Luke, something more than an *ad hoc* attempt in individual cases, especially if those *ad hoc* attempts fail to convince on their own. This particular passage is a case in point, as Kloppenborg details it. Goodacre has claimed that those extra verses in Matthew praising and exalting Peter would not have appealed to Luke because "Luke is not as positive about Peter overall as Matthew." As phrased, one might note, this statement hardly supports with any force the necessity that Luke would actually feel compelled to leave out those verses. But the statement is not even an acceptable assessment of Luke's attitude toward Peter. Kloppenborg provides several examples of Luke's personal highlighting of Peter and his role which should have made the "upon this rock" addition in Matthew something that would have appealed to him. Besides, for Luke to leave out such a powerful addition to the scene, one which served not only to elevate Peter but the very concept of the Church and its establishment and direction by Jesus, would require a pathological aversion to Peter on Luke's part which his Gospel as a whole does not show.

(3) Luke has failed to incorporate the material which is peculiar to Matthew, the so-called "M" material. Goodacre points to narrative elements in Matthew not derived from Mark which Luke *has* taken over (according to the MwQ scenario). But this does not solve the problem, since it is simply saying that Luke did take over some things from Matthew and not others. If anything, it shows that he *could* take over some of those elements, so it can be asked why not the rest? It once again boils down to suggested explanations as to why he did not take the particular things he left behind. Robert H. Stein (*The Synoptic Problem: An Introduction*, p. 102) enumerates some of them:

Why would Luke have omitted such material as the coming of the wise men? Would not the presence of such Gentiles at the birth of Jesus have been meaningful for Luke's Gentile-oriented Gospel? Why would he have omitted the flight to Egypt and return to Nazareth; the story of the guards at the tomb and their report; the unique Matthean material concerning the resurrection; and so on? Added to this is the observation that if Luke had before him Matthew's birth account and genealogy, one wonders if he would not have sought in some way to 'harmonize' the one we have in his Gospel with the Matthean version.

Goodacre argues for knowledge of Matthew's birth story on the grounds of basic common elements between them, namely Bethlehem, and the names of Jesus' parents and Mary being a virgin. But these would have been almost unavoidable even were the two stories independent. Bethlehem was undoubtedly determined for both by Micah 5:2, while Miriam was the most common female name and belonged to Moses' sister (his mother's name Jochebed may have been rejected as too archaic), while Joseph was the ancestral father of the Israelites who came out of Egypt. Kloppenborg points out that certain common phrases between the two evangelists are "purely formulaic," taken from scripture and thus "hardly unexpected given the context."

That said, of course, Luke could well have taken the name of Mary from Mark 6:3 (as could Matthew). The Ascension of Isaiah 11 incorporates a nativity scene which mentions Mary and father Joseph and it is apparently more primitive than either Matthew's or Luke's, indicating an earlier development. Where the names of Jesus' parents came from, even the one in Mark, is impossible to say, but it is not required that their appearance in Luke came from Matthew.

Again Goodacre appeals to the idea that Luke has left out elements from Matthew that he finds 'uncongenial.' Again Kloppenborg questions what was uncongenial, for example, about one parable when others that are essentially on the same theme can be found in Luke. The same query extends to key elements of Matthew's trial scene, such as the dream of Pilate's wife declaring Jesus innocent (Mt. 27:19) and Pilate's washing of his hands also declaring Jesus innocent and absolving himself of any responsibility for his death (27:24). Luke, after all, shows his own interest in making that declaration by putting it into the mouth of the centurion (Lk. 23:47).

(4) Another objection to Luke using Matthew is "alternating primitivity." When the same saying differs between Matthew and Luke, it is sometimes Luke who shows the more primitive form (difficult or lesser developed), sometimes Matthew. If Luke were copying from Matthew, we would expect that in virtually all these cases it would be Matthew who would possess the less developed form. Luke might 'improve' on Matthew (just as both frequently improve on Mark), but he would hardly be likely to rework him in a more primitive direction. The mix indicates that both evangelists are drawing on a common source, with both, each in their own cases, improving the sayings they use by clarifying an obscure meaning or enlarging to create a more sophisticated image or message.

A good example occurs in the Beatitudes opening the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5:3-11 contains nine beatitudes spoken by Jesus:

³Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

⁵Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

⁶Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they shall be satisfied.

⁷Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

⁸Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

⁹Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

¹⁰Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you
and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

This comparison will actually cover more than one point. For the above list in Matthew, this is what Luke presents in 6:20-22:

²⁰Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

²¹Blessed are you that hunger now, for you shall be satisfied.

Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh.

²²Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you
and revile you and cast out your name as evil,
on account of the Son of Man.

First, this demonstrates the drastic culling Luke would have performed on Matthew. Here we see a pruning of the Beatitudes that has removed most of the color and scent from Matthew's luxuriant garden. There can be no conceivable reason why Luke would have chosen to do this. Second, in regard to the point about primitivity, we can compare Matthew's verse 3 to Luke's verse 20. The former's "pure in spirit" is an expansion and a sophistication over the latter's (i.e., Q's) simpler and less inspiring version. Can we believe that for Matthew's "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" Luke would have chosen to substitute "Blessed are you that hunger now"?

Q scholars regard the beatitudes which Luke does not have to be the product of Matthew, inventions of his own to flesh out and enrich the catalogue of Q's pronouncements on the reversal of fortune theme. It is also possible that some of them existed in the ethos of Matthew's preaching circle, but were not recorded in Q and thus missed by Luke.

Matthew's verse 11 and Luke's verse 22 present us with something else of critical significance, indicated in other Q verses as well. Matthew has Jesus bless those who suffer persecution "on my account." Luke has Jesus bless those who suffer persecution "on account of the Son of Man." It is hardly to be thought that the original version was Matthew's self-reference by Jesus, and Luke changed this to the more oblique way of having Jesus refer to himself by the phrase/title Son of Man. We can compare a similar passage shared by all three Synoptics:

Mark 8:38 - "If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this wicked and godless age, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father and of the holy angels."

Matthew 10:32-3 - "Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven."

Luke 12:8-9 - "Every one who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God; but he who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God."

The versions by Matthew and Luke are regarded as derived from Q because they significantly differ from Mark's version: each is a double statement rather than a single one. (The likelihood that both expanded Mark in the same way is very small.) Here again, we have Luke allegedly altering an 'original' Matthean statement by Jesus in the first person (in the second half of each doublet) to use the more oblique "Son of Man." But Mark, too, has "the Son of Man" in that location in his saying, which indicates that *this* was the more primitive version of the idea, not the one by Matthew with the first person in both halves.

Two important observations can be made here. The similarity in Mark, who has not derived it from the Q document, is a good example of Mark sharing in the occasional Q tradition at a non-literary level, simply because we can presume that such things were orally present in his own kingdom milieu—though in this case not reflecting the fully developed doublet version found in Q by Matthew and Luke. To this extent Mark will occasionally contain something similar to Matthew and Luke's Q commonality (sometimes styled "Mark-Q overlaps").

But in comparing these three verses and making the logical deduction that Mark and Luke, in using "Son of Man," represent an earlier version, we can also observe in passing that this version may reveal a situation which I will maintain Q reflects, namely that the Son of Man in the early stages was regarded entirely as a divine figure who had yet to arrive on earth. Given Luke's version as the Q original, the speaker sounds as though the Son of Man is not himself. If that speaker is the founder Jesus figure, he is not yet being identified with Q's Son of Man, who will come only at the End-time. This will allow a further postulation that the earliest formulation of this saying presented the community prophets as the speakers, warning that those who rejected their message would be denied by the Son of Man when he arrived as God's judge.

When a founder figure was introduced, and the community's voice became subsumed in his, still the Son of Man seems to be a separate figure, not identified with him. While later Q may have come to envision that identification, it is only in Matthew's change to the Q saying that we can definitely see the two merging, the speaker also being the coming judge. Again, there is no reason to think that Luke would have destroyed that identification and reverted to the expression implying separation. This is not to say that Luke himself did not identify Jesus with the Son of Man; but he was content to allow what he saw as an implied association to stand in the saying and not choose to change it as Matthew did.

We can observe a similarly revealing difference between Luke 11:49 and Matthew 23:34 in regard to a saying by Jesus, which again brings us back to the question of whether Luke used Matthew:

Luke: "This is why the Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and messengers...'"

Matthew: "I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill..."

Matthew presents the saying entirely as the product of Jesus, speaking as the representative of God. Here it would be difficult to envision Luke taking it from Matthew but removing it from Jesus' mouth and having him attribute it to personified Wisdom. Rather, Matthew here shows his own consistency in taking references in Q to these other entities, the Son of Man and Wisdom, and for the most part making alterations which directly identify them with Jesus.

(5) Goodacre appeals to agreements between Matthew and Luke in certain of their sayings also shared with Mark, but which contain specific elements that are not found or are less developed in Mark. (A distinction is usually made between "major" and "minor" agreements, but the difference is only a matter of degree.) When such Matthean-Lukan material can be assigned to Q, there is no problem; the anomaly can be covered by Mark's derivation of it from less developed non-literary Q-type traditions. (Such "Mark-Q overlaps" are a reasonable postulation, given Mark's residence within a Q-type ethos.) Otherwise, the point made earlier about agreements in regard to Markan priority can usually be brought into play, namely that the difference existing in Mark may be the result of a later change made to Mark; the commonality in Luke and Matthew would be explainable by both independently having drawn from the older pre-canonical "Ur-Mark."

It may be that in a few cases these agreements are not that easily explained, and such agreements tend to constitute a major appeal made by Goodacre and others. However, given a manuscript tradition which is lacking before the 3rd century, it is once again ill-advised to risk too much on specific wordings between evangelists to argue something like the non-existence of Q, especially in the face of other, more significant indicators in the opposite direction. Generally, there are feasible alternatives which Q scholars have been able to find to explain these agreements.

One, for example, relates to the agreement appealed to by Goodacre as "the most striking" found in the Passion narrative, which of course could not involve Q. He points out that Mark, in 14:65, is speaking of the Sanhedrin striking Jesus, demanding that he "Prophesy!" To that demand, Matthew and Luke both add the same five words (in Greek): "Who is it that struck you?" That both came up with the identical addition, derived from neither Mark nor Q, is judged too unlikely a coincidence. Yet it would not be too much to postulate that this addition was the product of one of the two evangelists, enlarging on the motif of 'striking' in the previous verse (a motif inspired by Micah 5:1 LXX: "They shall smite the tribes of Israel with a rod upon the cheek."). In the course of manuscript transmission this addition familiar in the one could have been inserted in the text of the other.

We know that this sort of thing was done in other cases. Perhaps the best example is the addition of words (v.19b-20) to Jesus' establishment of the Eucharist in Luke's scene of the Last Supper. While not taken verbatim from Matthew and Mark, 19b-20 is clearly a later paraphrase of their common passage (and another Matthean element Luke inexplicably failed to take over). The same thing occurred in filling Mark's void on post-resurrection appearances of Jesus by a cribbing from the other Gospels. When something was felt to belong in a spot where it was noticed to be 'missing' the impulse was to supply it, perhaps even unconsciously. In this case, familiarity with Matthew's extra line after Mark's "Prophecy!" could have led to adding it after an original "Prophecy!" by Luke (or possibly vice-versa), a scribal phenomenon known as "assimilation."

(6) Goodacre proposes a feature which he calls "editorial fatigue."¹⁷ In such a phenomenon, a writer begins a passage by imposing an intended change on his source, but before he finishes he lapses into original elements of that source, thereby creating an inconsistency or contradiction between earlier and later parts. In other words, the copying writer fails to sustain his own changes. For example, Matthew in 8:1-4 has Jesus, while being "followed by a great crowd," cure a leper, to whom he then says: "Tell no one." This is a pointless admonition given the presence of the crowd. But in his source, which is Mark 1:40-45, no crowd has been introduced and the admonition makes better sense. In determining to keep Mark's latter words even in the context of a crowd, Matthew seems to have overlooked or ignored the contradiction he has created.

Does Luke do the same in any of his passages and thereby betray a lapse into a source in Matthew? Such things are not so clear as in the example given above. In that example we know that the source is in fact Mark, whereas a Lukan source in Matthew is the very thing that must be determined. Thus the examples offered for the latter need to be particularly evident.

We can look at Goodacre's two principal examples of alleged Lukan editorial fatigue when using Matthew.

Matthew 10:11-14 presents Jesus instructing his apostles when they "enter a town" to stay in the house of some worthy citizen. He then tells them when they "leave that house or town...shake the dust from your feet." Luke, in 9:4-5, has no initial words about entering a town, but begins by talking about entering a house; later he tells them "as you leave the town, shake the dust from your feet." Goodacre points out that Luke's reference to leaving the town is lacking any antecedent, since he has not mentioned a town at the opening, and this is taken to indicate that the concluding "town" is derived from Matthew's version. But this is surely reading too much into the situation. Whether Luke has mentioned a town initially or not, it can certainly be the case that such a thing has been assumed. Luke need not be drawing from Matthew to introduce the leaving of a town, since he could simply have the assumption in mind that the house was located in a town, something that would be quite natural.

In Luke's Parable of the Pounds (19:11-27), a departing nobleman gives ten servants each a pound, urging them to trade it wisely. When he returns, he finds

that one servant has made a profit oftenfold, a second a profit of fivefold, while a third stored his pound and made no profit at all, incurring the master's wrath. Itemizing the actions of only three servants would seem to be inconsistent with the initial statement of giving money to ten. In Matthew's version of the parable, however, only three servants are mentioned at the beginning as recipients, so that the attention given to only three at the master's return is consistent. Goodacre takes this as indicating that Luke, after starting out with ten servants, has lapsed into Matthew's version (his supposed source) with only three.

Yet this seems problematic in itself. First of all, one might wonder why Luke would change Matthew's three servants into ten to begin with. He would surely not be intending to go through ten servants' results upon the master's return, creating an utterly unwieldy parable. (If he did, perhaps it was "fatigue" that caused him to stop at three!) Second, the Greek in referring to the third servant is "*ho heteros*," which is not "the *third*" but "the *other*," and some translations (RSV, NASB, NIV, KJV) render it "*another*," with no necessary implication that it is the third and final. Thus we need not assume that Luke has lapsed into envisioning only three servants and is thereby betraying a source in Matthew.

In fact, the likely explanation is that Luke introduced ten servants to better symbolize the meaning of his version of the parable: that Christians left behind at Jesus' departure (at his death) are charged with spreading the faith and enlarging its membership, but he only intended to deal with three such disciples on Jesus' return (at the Parousia) as representative examples. Understanding it this way is no doubt why some translators and commentators render "*ho heteros*" as "*another*," despite the definite article—which in any case some manuscripts lack. (*The Englishman's Greek New Testament*, for example, omits the article "*ho*" from its Greek text and translates "*heteros*" as "*another*," pointing out that the article is added only in some manuscripts.) Besides, to think that over the course of only a few verses Luke could have forgotten that he was intending to deal with the results of ten servants' investments would require him to have been brain-dead rather than merely fatigued.

These examples, then, are less than compelling. But Goodacre has further undercut them by a qualifying admission. He notes that both of these examples are regarded as derived from Q, and thus whatever 'fatigue' Luke might be showing could have happened when taking over this parable from Q, and not necessarily from Matthew. While his argument has thus been rendered moot, Goodacre seeks to rescue it by claiming that we can find examples of this fatigue in regard to Luke's use of the alleged Q, but in regard to Matthew's use of Q he "cannot find any." Considering that the examples offered for the former are shaky at best and largely subjective, the 'absence' of the latter may be a matter of subjectivity as well.

(7) There is a distinctive quality and content in the common material assigned to Q. Kloppenborg points to prominent themes and elements that shine out in Q as central concerns but which are not of significant interest in the rest of Matthew and Luke. And vice-versa: Matthean interests such as Jesus being

observant and the fulfillment of Torah, or Jesus as messianic shepherd, do not play a role in Q. In other words, if the material in Matthew allotted to Q were actually his product, we would expect at least some of these dominant Matthean interests to appear in that material as well. As Kloppenborg puts it (p.225), "[Q] exhibits a thematic coherence that does not derive from Matthew's redactional interests."

But Kloppenborg has left out consideration of one very important dimension of Matthean (and Lukan) interest: the soteriological role of Jesus and his death and resurrection. It would have been a much more powerful example of Q's distinctive quality had he pointed out that it contains nothing on these matters. For Matthew, in allegedly creating the material copied by Luke—otherwise to be allotted to Q—has managed to produce a large body of sayings and anecdotes which make no bow whatever to those essential concerns of *all* the Gospels. This observation was what turned many scholars off to the very idea of Q when it was first presented: how could there have been such a document that was devoid of any reference to the death and resurrection of Jesus, any allusion to his saving atonement and sacrificial role?

Today, we should bring the same objection to the claim that there was no Q. How could Matthew have managed to supply from his own invention a separate body of material which consistently exhibits that very void? (He would hardly have done it deliberately.) How could he create within that material, for example, a primary focus on the murder and ill-treatment of prophets sent from God and yet not include Jesus himself within that catalog? The objection that the Jesus of the story had not died yet falters on the pervasive use found in Matthew and Luke which they and Mark have made of Jesus' own prophetic allusion to his fate (an invention of Mark as in 8:31, etc.), or through parables like the murder of the vineyard owner's son (Mk. 12:1-9).

In other words, in the MwQ scenario, Matthew has miraculously created a subset of material which bears all the marks of a separate document with its own set of interests and characteristics, and one which entirely lacks the essential concerns of his own larger document into which he has fitted it.

How Matthew—and separately Luke—saw the Q document as representing something which could cohere with the larger story they were fashioning, and yet were not bothered by the same anomalies, cannot be said; part of it would depend on what degree of historicity (if any) they envisioned for their creations, something very difficult for us to calculate. But it has to be remembered that they were building on a previously written Gospel which had already performed this amalgamation at a more basic level, something it had done without benefit of a document which might have alerted its author to that fundamental anomaly.

(8) If no Q document existed and Matthew becomes the originator of the common material, two other problems are introduced.

The first is the difficulty in envisioning that someone of Matthew's mentality could have originated many of the sayings assigned to Q. Matthew was a hidebound traditionalist who emphasized the saying placed in Jesus' mouth that

"not a letter, not a stroke, will disappear from the Law" (5:18). He was a fulminating prophet who painted a chilling, pitiless picture of the final judgment by the Son of Man, amid "wailing and grinding of teeth" (25:30-46). He penned the most heinous line in all of world fiction: "His blood be upon us and upon our children" (27:25). He was humorless, intolerant, virulently anti-Jewish—even if he was likely Jewish himself. Who can imagine that from his mind and pen could come: "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you...If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn and offer him your left...Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful"?

If there were no Q, we face a notable problem with the Gospel of Thomas. Those sayings in Thomas which are similar to the Q1 stratum would have no roots in the past but would instead have to be traced to Matthew. Yet too good a case has been made which rules out a dependence of Thomas on the Synoptic Gospels. (See Stephen J. Patterson: *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, p.9-16; J. D. Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, p. 117-118; H. Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, p.84-85.)

If it is suggested that Matthew did not originate all this material, but drew it from some other source, then one has simply reinvented Q. The concept of Q is in any case much preferable to the idea that a small handful of evangelists were responsible for virtually all of the Gospel content, for it opens up much wider headwaters for understanding the great variety of ideas which flowed into Christianity and were eventually deposited in the Gospels. If it is acceptable to envision the Gospel of Mark as reflecting the ethos and traditions of a Q-style preaching movement based in Galilee, it is hardly a quantum leap to envision that ethos as embodied in a document which Mark himself happened not to possess (perhaps because it was not as far along in its evolution), but which later came into the hands of Matthew and Luke.

To all of this we can attach a significant corollary. If the above arguments do indeed point to the existence of a Q, we have identified it as a separate source branch of the composite Christian picture, one bearing its own distinctive and unique stamp. It witnesses to a movement which preached an apocalyptic figure (the Son of Man) that had nothing to do with an earthly man, whether regarded as an incarnation of God or not; one which offered no salvation through the death and resurrection of anyone, on earth or in heaven; one which shows no sign of cultic rituals which were a characteristic of circles like Paul's; and one whose founder figure, when he arrived, possessed no heavenly dimension until he was swallowed up in the Gospels. It is a picture which witnesses to a dramatic event of syncretism, one that on a literary level occurred almost overnight, though it took decades to work its way through the faith of a diverse movement, carried by boots on the ground.

And it presents us with pieces in a complex puzzle that can only come together in a coherent way in the context of Jesus mythicism. For it disconnects the component parts of Jesus of Nazareth in a way that leaves no single viable entity that could support Christianity's end product.

Excavating the Roots of Q

Before examining the contents of Q more closely, we should look at the possible historical setting which gave rise to the kingdom preaching movement and the teachings embodied in the document it produced. The sayings in Q1 served as a response to a particular social and economic situation of the time. We can assume that the Q community was centered in Galilee by the references (in Q2) to the towns and cities of that region: Capernaum, Bethsaida, Chorazin. The Gospel of Thomas (a sayings collection somewhat similar to Q to be examined in the next chapter) contains a category of sayings which echo many of those of Q1, suggesting that they were derived through some connection with the early Q community or document, or some antecedent of the latter. While the community of Thomas may have developed later and probably further north in Syria, we can include it beside some general observations about Q.

Both documents speak of "the kingdom of God." As demonstrated in chapter 5, this concept owed its roots to a longstanding expectation in Jewish circles that God would elevate the nation over its subjugators, effect judgment upon the world and bring about a Utopian age. The Q community sees this arrival of the kingdom in apocalyptic terms: the heavenly Son of Man will arrive to conduct a judgment of fire, and John the Baptist is claimed as a forerunner who preached his coming. The Gospel of Thomas, on the other hand, expresses virtually no apocalyptic expectation, and the 'son of man' appears only in a saying (#86) which looks to be simply a proverb about "man" in general or perhaps the sect itself (and thus should not be capitalized). Thomas' own message, taking into account the sum of its sayings, seems to be about the attainment of an inner kingdom and salvation through mystical knowledge, which gives it some links to Gnosticism. Yet both documents are reacting against a society which has marginalized certain disadvantaged classes and created injustices so grievous that they can be remedied only by divine intervention or by withdrawal into a counter-culture.

A Counter-Culture Movement in Galilee

Consider the tone of many of the sayings of Q1. These may be cast in a wisdom style, but they are radically different in outlook from those found in either traditional Jewish or non-Jewish wisdom writings. The latter teach how to get along and be successful in the real world. In Q and Thomas, a reversal of normal class structure and fortune is in order. What is called for is the creation of a *new* world: "Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of God." We find a

parable about God's banquet in the kingdom, to which the rich have declined attendance, to be replaced by the poor of the streets and byways. To be a member of this movement and kingdom, one must hate one's father and mother, separate from one's family (since counter-cultures always involve splits with those who do not take part or who cannot sympathize). God will take care of his own; he takes care of the sparrow so he will certainly take care of us. And so on.

What, then, was the setting in which this original body of teachings arose, or were first applied? They seem to be the expression of a disadvantaged class, one that has removed itself—or been removed—from participation in society as a whole. It is made up of people who can only look to God and their own devices to survive. Throughout history there have always been people and classes in such a situation, though not all of them have been part of a culture which has an active expectation of imminent intervention by God to set up a new world order. However, since we can locate the Q-Thomas expression somewhere in the mid-1st century Palestine area, what can we identify about this particular movement?

John Dominic Crossan, in his 1998 book *The Birth of Christianity*, has formulated a very detailed and focused picture of the Q ethos, a picture which almost certainly agrees in quality with the situation on the Galilean scene.

That scene involved an increasing urbanization of the country under Roman rule. Herod Antipas, during the second and third decades of the 1st century, had rebuilt the city of Sepphoris and founded Tiberias within 20 miles of each other near the Sea of Galilee. This was to have devastating effects on the surrounding agrarian population. The new centers tended to drain the agricultural resources of the area, placing increased burdens of work and taxation on the rural peasantry. Urban elites gained ever greater ownership of the farming land, indenturing or dispossessing the peasants, often driving them to become beggars or bandits. Crossan also sees artisans as a struggling group of formerly dispossessed peasants. Exploitation accelerated and the gap between rich and poor widened.

Oppressed peasant classes rarely have the opportunity to revolt, and virtually never successfully. Their response is almost always one of attitude. They adopt highly critical stances against ordinary social conventions and political power structures. They refuse to cooperate any more than they have to with those in authority. They criticize wealth, the values of the cities and ruling circles, and the traditional religious institutions which are usually under the control of the rich establishment. A counter-culture movement with radical standards and expectations may develop, in which the newly disadvantaged can take heart and part. There may be new religious and mythical dimensions to its outlook and expectations. If the dispossessed themselves lack the power to bring about change or restitution, a supernatural power may be regarded as being on their side and promising to effect the desired radical change and reversal. Utopias are envisioned and actively sought. The focus on evil in the world becomes less a concern with individual evil than with the evil arising from class inequalities. The prevailing outlook becomes a resistance movement against *systemic* evil.

In any Jewish milieu (or one attaching itself to Judaism), another factor will enter the picture. The best of the Hebrew biblical tradition, one expressed chiefly in the prophets, is the concept of the God of Israel as a God of justice and righteousness, one who champions the weak and powerless, the vulnerable, the unfortunate. Social unrest and resistance may thus be grounded in the view that class inequalities and the suffering of the poor are contrary to God's will and that he will intervene before long to right all wrongs.

Thus, Crossan sees a Galilee in the 20s of the 1st century pervaded by a peasant resistance movement brought about by the deleterious effects of increasing rural commercialization and fed by old biblical streams of religious idealism focused on social justice. This lower class resistance to Roman rule and its compromised Jewish aristocracy is witnessed by the many recorded disturbances in the supposed time of Jesus: prophets leading groups into the desert, or to the banks of the Jordan, "usually unarmed, always slaughtered" (*op.cit.*, p.210). This social unrest eventually led to an explosion of banditry, political instability, finally to outright revolt culminating in the disastrous Jewish War of 66-70. In the Galilee of the 20s and 30s it created the kingdom of God movement. For Crossan and others in the field, its driving force, its chief innovative wellspring, was Jesus of Nazareth.

The Q1 Sayings: Are they Jewish?

Can we automatically assume that the bedrock layer of the two documents, the wisdom sayings of Q1 and their parallels in the Gospel of Thomas, are the product of a Jesus of Nazareth, or indeed of any single individual? Let's take a more detailed look at some of the Q1 sayings:

"Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of God."

"If you love only those who love you, what credit is that to you?"

"Treat others as you would like them to treat you."

"Can one blind man be guide to another? Will they not both fall into the ditch?"

"Do not carry purse or bag, and travel barefoot; exchange no greetings on the road."

"Think of the ravens: they neither sow nor reap; they have no storehouse or barn; yet God feeds them... Your father knows that you need these things."

"Sell your possessions and give in charity. Store up your wealth in heaven where no thief can get it...for where your wealth is, there will be your heart as well."

First, this is a curious collection of sayings for a Jewish preacher, presumably within a community largely made up of Jews, and of gentiles who follow Jewish ways. In all of Q1 there is scarcely a specifically Jewish idea to be found. The odd mundane saying may exist in both pagan and oral rabbinic lore (the latter found only later in the Talmud), but we cannot thereby identify its Q appearance as derived from a Jewish source. N. T. Wright, in *The New Testament and the People of God* (p.284-5), speaks of Jewish concerns in this period:

Far more important to the first-century Jew than questions of space, time and literal cosmology were the key issues of Temple, Land, and Torah, of race, economy and justice. When Israel's God acted, Jews would be restored to their ancestral rights and would practice their ancestral religion, with the rest of the world looking on in awe, and/or making pilgrimages to Zion, and/or being ground to powder under Jewish feet.

But where are all—or any—of these Jewish preoccupations in Q1 (and the parallel layer of the Gospel of Thomas)? Where is the divine mandate, the will of the covenantal God of Judaism, the future role of the gentile, the restoration of Zion in a new Jerusalem? Where is the all-important tradition of the prophets?

The question of the ethnic identity of the people who formulated and/or used Q1 touches on several bases. In regard to Galilee itself, Burton Mack says (*The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q*, p.53):

As for Galilee, it had never been fully incorporated into the cultural entity that Christians imagine as 'Israel.' It was a land of mixed peoples, a crossroads, and a kind of buffer zone on the borders of petty kingdoms that had their centers to the north in Syria, to the east in Transjordan and Damascus, and to the south in Samaria and Jerusalem.

In a setting such as Galilee, cases could be made that the Q community was composed of either Jews or a combination of Jews and gentiles. Gentiles, in the phenomenon known as "Godfearers" all across the empire, had adopted certain Jewish traits and interests, particularly subscribing to scripture, prophecy, and apocalyptic expectation; this they would be likely do in association with actual Jews, especially in a cosmopolitan, crossroads area like Galilee. The Jewish character of the preaching movement and its people is unmistakable in Q2, regardless of their ethnic makeup, and perhaps we would be safest in styling the Q community as a Hellenistic-Jewish one.^{11s}

But the ethnic identity of the Q people is not the key issue. The question is, if unmistakable Jewish traits are in evidence in the sayings of Q2, why does Q1 not show those same traits, those same issues? It becomes not a question of the ethnicity of those adopting and following Q1, but the ethnic nature of its source and whether it is to be reasonably associated with a Jewish Jesus of Nazareth.

Why do we find a void on all things specifically Jewish? Would this Jesus, allegedly speaking in Q1, never have expressed himself in Jewish terms, never given voice to the tradition of Yahwehan justice and righteousness, to the prophets as biblical precedent? Would he never give a hint of the traditional question (again going back into the prophets) of whether the people's sins and the need for repentance had anything to do with the present state of affairs? Would he never have allowed a flavor of prophetic or apocalyptic fervor to pass his lips? Why is it left to the Q2 generation to introduce such elements? Could it be that the bedrock layer of the Q material is not Jewish at all, but arises from a more cosmopolitan source, adopted and to some extent adapted, by a Jewish or mixed community whose real character can be seen in Q2?

Kloppenborg himself identifies key elements of the Sermon on the Mount as belonging to the general category of "sapiential and philosophical works.... [T]he motifs of imitation of God and of the righteous as *huios theou* [Q 6:35] are thoroughly at home in the wisdom tradition and Hellenistic popular philosophy" [*op.cit.*, p.180]. In other words, these key elements of Q1—the very core of Christian ethics as attributed to Jesus—are as much pagan ethics as Jewish.

What then are said to be the specifically Jewish elements of Q1? Those regularly appealed to are hardly striking. There is a reference to Solomon in Q12:27: "Solomon in all his splendor was not attired like one of these [lilies]." But as a legendary figure reputed to have possessed great riches, Solomon would hardly be unknown to anyone who lived in the vicinity of Palestine, and especially anyone who knew the scriptures. His status would lend itself to him being used in proverbial fashion even by non-Jews. Q 6:20-23 (Luke's beatitudes about the poor and the hungry), are declared to be a deliberate allusion to Isaiah 61:1-2 ("the Lord has sent me to bring good news to the humble, to bind up the broken-hearted..."). But besides not possessing more than a general similarity of sentiment, Q's promises to the downtrodden of Galilee are similar to Isaiah's promises to the downtrodden of Israel because of the common nature of both expressions, though their situations were different. The Beatitudes do not reflect specifically Jewish concerns; they are the concerns of the disenfranchised poor of Galilee and would be applicable whether such people were Jew or gentile.

Then there are two passages suggested to be using gentiles as "negative examples," rendering the speakers Jewish; but is such a meaning likely?

"If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners [*hamartdloi*] do that."¹¹⁹ [Q 6:33-34]

There are various definitions of *hamartdloi*. The principal one is the word in English: sinners. There is nothing to prevent this from being a reference (by Jews or gentiles) to actual sinners, whether Jewish or Greek, within the broader society outside the sect. Bauer's lexicon notes that it can refer to irreligious or unobservant *Jews*. Bauer also points out that it can serve, among Jews, as a general term for heathen, which is the way Kloppenborg is taking it, although the examples given by Bauer are from pre-New Testament writings. Thus there is no guarantee that the Q reference singles out gentiles as a group (sinners or not) rather than actual sinners of any ethnic group.

In fact, it is not at all likely, if one considers the situation. The Q saying is advocating an ethic which is beyond the ordinary. Is the speaker liable to use the term "sinners" to apply to all gentiles (even the non-sinners among them) as a derogatory comparison to those who follow the new ethic? That would hardly win over gentiles in the audience, who would definitely have been present in Galilee. Nor would it have pleased any gentiles who were present within the community itself, a situation that is also fairly likely. The phrase "even sinners do such-and-such" makes sense in this context only if it is a reference to actual sinning people who stand in contrast to the good people of the new ethic. In other words, it is an in-group vs. out-group contrast.

Q 12:30 is equally uncertain. "Do not seek what you may eat and drink," the speaker declares; these things all the nations of the world [*ethne tou kosmou*] seek after. This might amount to little more than saying that 'the whole world' occupies itself with such things, but you should not because the Father will look after you. Again, the contrast is between the in-group and the out-group, without the latter being a specific and denigrating reference to gentiles.

Q 9:61-62 may express the same sentiment as 1 Kings 19:19-21, but the idea that a prospective disciple has to leave all behind to follow a Master is a world-wide sentiment and does not require a specific Jewish connotation or biblical derivation. Nor does a mere mention of "the Torah" in 16:16 provide us with Wright's "key issue...of Torah," for this does not relate to its support or to a concern for its preservation when "Jews would be restored to their ancestral rights and would practice their ancestral religion." Such a context is missing in Q. In fact, 16:16 blithely dismisses study of "the law and the prophets" as a thing of the past, supplanted by John the Baptist's preaching of the kingdom of God.

All these alleged Jewish features are too weak to counter the observation that the Q1 stratum lacks a specifically Jewish character, but it also overlooks the fact that such features would be easily accounted for in the adaptation of a foreign source by a Hellenistic-Jewish community, with such an adaptation involving bringing in scripture. The adaptation as a whole, however, remains surprisingly shallow, and the observation that it lacks important and characteristic Jewish elements still stands. Once again, the issue is not the ethnic makeup of the early Q community; that community could even have been made up almost entirely of *ethnic* Jews, but ones that had strayed far from any sort of 'mainstream' Jewish character. The issue is the nature of Q1 itself as the alleged product of Jewish interests, let alone of a Jewish preacher as we should expect Jesus of Nazareth to be. Without that identifiable Jewish character, the option is open not only to ruling out the content of Q1 as the product of a Jewish Jesus, but to seeing it as the product of an essentially non-Jewish source. To all this, we can add that Q, to all appearances, was originally written in Greek and not in any Semitic language.

A Cynic Precedent

If Q1 has little or no Jewish character, what character *does* it convey? Since the mid-1980s, some scholars¹²⁰ have called attention to a startling and intriguing feature about the sayings in Q1. These "wisdom" aphorisms bear a strong resemblance to the spirit and style of a specific and widespread Hellenistic preaching movement of the time, that of the Cynics.

During the 1st century, wandering Cynic philosophers were tramping the cities and byways of the empire, urging people to adopt a lifestyle, an outlook on the world which was both religious and social. They were following the teaching and way of life of Diogenes of Sinope, founder of the Cynic philosophy. They were gadflies, convinced that society was too authoritarian, too inequalitarian, too hypocritical. They were a kind of 'in your face' protester, motivated by the feeling that some divine power was directing them to shake up society.

Like Q, they too spoke of a benevolent God the Father. Epictetus, a Stoic philosopher who adopted Cynic traditions and preached to the poor and humble masses, was recorded to have said: "All men have always and everywhere a Father who cares for them" (*Discourses* III, 24). Dio of Prusa urged people to trust in providence, for "Consider the beasts yonder, and the birds, how much freer from trouble they live than man" (*Discourses* 10.16).

The Cynics, too, had their Beatitudes. Blessed is the person, said Epictetus, who enjoyed the proper relationship with the deity (*Discourses* III, xx, 15).

And what of Jesus' most distinctive teaching: Love your enemies, turn the other cheek? Seneca in the mid-1st century reported (*Moral Letters*, 71,7) this piece of counter-cultural Cynic philosophy: "Allow any man that desires to insult you and work you wrong; but if only virtue dwells in you, you will suffer nothing. If you wish to be happy, if you would wish in good faith to be a good man, let one person or another despise you." Epictetus reported favorably on the Cynic aspiration to brotherly love, remarking on their view that "when one is being flogged like an ass, he must love the men who flog him" (*Discourses* III, 22, 53).

The admonition in the Luke and Matthew Sermon (Q 6:41-2) that one should not fuss over the splinter in a brother's eye while ignoring the beam in one's own, is mirrored in Epictetus who admonishes that one should not "be censuring the rest of mankind while he himself is deep in vice" (*Discourses* III, 22, 93).

These are more than distant echoes of the Sermons on the Mount and the Plain. They are teachings cut from the same cloth.

The Cynics and popular philosophy even possessed the concept of a kingdom of God, though with no apocalyptic associations. Rather, the phrase was a symbol for the stance toward the world which the Cynics were advocating. The one who ruled over his or her passions was a 'king' in a new domain, living in a different, natural order under special divine rule. This is the very atmosphere conveyed by the references to the kingdom in Q1.

When compared with Q's "rules of the road" (the Q preacher was an itinerant who went from place to place), the practice of Cynic preachers in their own wanderings about the empire was almost identical. (Downing notes that this is "quite widely acknowledged.") For both, the divine call necessitated a total break with family and possessions, a voluntary adoption of homelessness and poverty. The saying in Q 14:27, that a disciple had to "take up his cross" and follow the Master, has been suggested as a Cynic-Stoic proverb, and Rudolf Bultmann thought it might have been used by the Jewish Zealots as well. It signified full submission to a calling of hardship and dedication.

Not only are the sentiments of Q1 similar to Cynic philosophy, the way some of them are presented fit the structure of the Cynic *chreia*. This was a little anecdote about a teacher, consisting of a question or objection and a response. A famous story about Diogenes took this chreic shape:

Diogenes was asked why he begged from a statue. He answered, "So that I will get practice in being refused."

To which one could compare Q's *chreia*-like anecdote:

A man invited to follow Jesus said, "Let me go and bury my father first." But Jesus said: "Leave the dead to bury their dead."

One of the most heated debates within Q research is the question of whether Q1 can be identified as "Cynic" and whether on that basis Jesus can or should be described as a "Cynic-style sage." Burton Mack is probably the best known advocate of Jesus as a Cynic-style sage.¹²¹ More recently, Leif Vaage supports the Cynic character of the preaching attributed to Jesus, and Robert Price, while doubtful of the existence of Jesus, sees Q1 itself as primarily Cynic. (Note that there should be no confusion here that either Price or myself advocate that the earliest Q people *were* Cynics.) Opposition to such a view, that Q1 seems to have been adopted or adapted from a prior non-Jewish source which was the product of Cynics or ultimately traceable to Cynic practice and philosophy, centers on two objections.

The first is, were there Cynics in Galilee in this period? Christopher Tuckett (*<Q and the History of Early Christianity: Studies on Q*, p.368f) argues against the presence of Cynics in Galilee and a lack of Cynic writings in the period leading up to the formation of the Q community. Price, on the other hand, points to the *general* spread of Cynicism in this period, with Meleager the Cynic (d.50 BCE) being active in nearby Gadara.¹²²

So we have a dispute as to whether Cynics had to be living in the same town or perhaps on the same block to posit such an influence or source. Moreover, Kloppenborg allows that

the Cynic hypothesis does not require that Cynics be attested in large numbers in the early first century CE...It only requires one of two assumptions: either that there were still *some*...persons who would be identified as cynic-like on the basis of their dress, behavior, or teaching, or that the *literary* figure of the Cynic and the basic profile of Cynic behavior and teaching were sufficiently well-known to be recognized when they were encountered in a *literary* presentation of Jesus...¹²³

It thus becomes something of a picayune exercise to raise such questions as to how a Cynic document could have come into the hands of Jews involved in the genesis of the Galilean Q community, or how great a degree of evidence of contact is required to support some form of borrowing or derivation. We can only make postulations based on the evidence we *do* have, and part of that evidence is the nature of Q1 and its comparison both with Cynicism and Jewish interests. Such postulations may never be more than arguable, but that does not mean that they ought to be ruled out.

Crossan, in his *Birth of Christianity* (p.333-335) provides "An Aside on Cynicism" in which he claims that while

no direct or genetic link between Cynicism and Jesus (has) been either proved or disproved....on the level of comparative religion I find Cynicism very illuminating for the historical Jesus.

This, of course, starts with an assumption of the existence of the two parties, which allows Cynicism to cast light on Jesus but not on the possible derivation of some ethics of a movement with no Jesus; those two alternative approaches—interpreting Jesus or interpreting a movement—lead to quite different results in understanding the early roots of Christianity. Crossan remarks: "If *pagans* heard Jesus speaking about the kingdom of God, how would they have understood his program? Some sort of Cynicism, surely." This is an acknowledgement that the kingdom program bore strong resemblance to Cynic ideas.¹⁻⁴

There is also a splitting of hairs by those who argue that we cannot identify a "genetic" relationship between Q1 and Cynicism. But how narrowly are we to define "genealogy"? Whether we postulate (facetiously) that it was a Cynic's son who was the founding father of the kingdom movement and brought a Cynic manifesto with him, or simply a case of some indirect exposure and contact with Cynic ideas (whether written or oral) through lengthier channels, ideas that were appealing and useful to people involved in the beginning of the Q movement, we would still have a 'genetic' connection. There may be a need for caution in floating these possibilities, but the appeal to such opposing arguments suggests that this is yet another concern for denying any possibility of syncretism between 'pure' Christian origins and outside contamination, especially one that would severely compromise the very nature of Jesus and his alleged teachings.

Note the final portion of the above quote. Kloppenborg is quite comfortable with seeing Q1 as a *literary* presentation of Jesus which conformed to known Cynic precedents. But if the literary presentation of Jesus and his teachings closely conformed to a Cynic mode, as Kloppenborg acknowledges, and if it were at all accurate, this would make Jesus a "Cynic-style sage." It would make the literary creation *modeled on* Jesus as a Cynic-type preacher. On the other hand, how does one distinguish between this and a literary creation that is simply derived from a broader Cynic-type ethos and not an individual, especially when that individual is missing from the literary presentation? On any count, a 'genetic dependency' on things Cynic is to be deduced.

However, the Jesus alternative forces us into a scenario which does not ring true. Was Jesus really an imitation-Cynic, showing little interest in or expression of things Jewish? Did he get his grand ethical ideas from somewhere else? Why did he not, as a charismatic individual (one assumes), impose personal features and interests, including biographical, on that literary creation? From another angle, is it likely that the earliest Christians in Galilee would, after Jesus' death, formulate a literary creation of him which mimicked Cynic patterns so closely and exclusively? Is it not likely that they would have reworked them into a record that included more recognizably Jewish interests and a recognizable individual? Is this a viable genesis of the one document and community which critical scholars think gets them closest to the genuine historical Jesus?

Scholarly readings of (and into) Q create complications like this that are not readily resolvable, and often not even recognized in the presence of axiomatic assumptions. The better explanation for this "literary creation" is that it has been

formed on the model of its precedent, not on a Jesus figure. It represents the adoption by the early kingdom community of a pre-existing ethic and lifestyle very like that of the Cynics, either ultimately derived from them or influenced by them. This ethic and lifestyle is something this community, even if made up of a mix in which ethnic Jews may have predominated, has chosen to follow and is now recording in the beginnings of a 'foundation document.' All of this best makes sense in the *absence* of a founder figure.

Literary vs. Tradition History

Both Kloppenborg and Crossan stress a distinction between tradition-history and literary-history. The former term refers to the time or sequence in which the various units of Q were (orally) formed in the community, whether by Jesus himself or shortly after his passing, or later in church development. The latter term refers to the time or sequence in which those units were placed in the (written) Q document; in other words, its "compositional" history. In principle, as both scholars point out, there is no necessary correspondence between the two. A traditional saying might be very old, even authentic to Jesus himself, and yet not be added to the literary collection until later, perhaps even subsequent to the inclusion of inauthentic sayings that were formed after the old or genuine ones.

However, the latter situation is a theoretical one only. Kloppenborg makes no attempt to demonstrate that any Q2 sayings were in fact older than, or at least contemporary with, any Q1 sayings. His statement of principle seems designed to soften the disquieting possibility that everything in Q2 and Q3 is later invention and does not go back to an historical figure at the root of Q. But in fact there is nothing which would preclude Q2 and Q3 from indeed having a later tradition history than Q1, nothing that would preclude the tradition history in the Q document from moving more or less in lockstep with its literary history, its compositional sequence.

But we need to clarify how the compositional history of the Q document may reflect the progress of the community itself. While it is difficult to reduce current scholarly study of Q and its inherent variety of interpretation to what could be called a "standard" way of looking at things, we may say this. In general, Q1 is seen as representing a *temporal* phase, a period in the history of the document and its community during which it was used by the earliest preaching movement; its content was largely the product of Jesus himself as the promulgator of these 'wisdom' teachings. Q2 is then seen as representing a somewhat later phase, one reflecting the community's reactionary stance to rejection and animosity from the society at large. It was, they say, undoubtedly set down after Jesus' passing but, in at least some of the sayings, it drew on things he himself had said. In this case (Kloppenborg pronounces it "probable") the later stage of 'literary/compositional history' would not coincide with 'tradition history,' for this later stage in Q's composition would have included earlier material from the historical tradition, only not set down in writing at the time of Q1's compilation.

According to this favored scenario, then, we have an initial stage, represented by Q1, in which sayings of Jesus were compiled and set down in writing, and preached. But there is a curious anomaly here. If Q1 represents an initial period in a community of Jesus followers, why would such a compilation have been restricted entirely to the wisdom-type sayings? If the actual sayings of Q2, or at least some of them, were genuine to Jesus and part of the tradition of that community, why were none of them included in the first compilation of sayings represented by Q1? If Jesus said them, then this is a witness to the experience of rejection and animosity right from the time of his ministry, and there would have been no reason for his followers to leave their recording only until a later time.

Why, moreover, does that first compilation, presumably set down soon after Jesus' passing, provide no information about Jesus himself, no biography, no association of any of its individual pieces with an event or time in his ministry, no mention of disciples, let alone by name as we find in the Gospel of Thomas? Why is there no identification of its sayings with any particular person at all? (There is one exception, revealing in itself, which will be addressed shortly.)

Scholars have long been unable to agree on Jesus' primary nature. The Jesus Seminar shied away from seeing him as an apocalyptic preacher and focused on his role as a teacher of the wisdom ethic, but more recent tendencies seem to be moving back in the other direction. But either he was as the Seminar maintained, which might explain why Q1 is so exclusively selective in only one direction, or he was not and we are mystified as to that exclusive selection. (If he had no apocalyptic interests, of course, then we have a Q2 prophetic/apocalyptic layer which *was* a later invention entirely and would not go back to a Jesus.)

In the standard reasoning surrounding the distinction between Q1 and Q2, it has been asked why anyone should assume that the Q community would have had reliable access to one set of traditions, namely the wisdom ethic of Q1, but not to another set of traditions, the ones represented by Q2. Christopher Tuckett consequently prefers to see in the Q1-Q2 block a possible combination of two bodies of tradition, perhaps even two antecedent documents.

But this raises similar problems. Why would the wisdom sayings (Q1) be devoid of reference to and involvement by Jesus but comprise only a body of seemingly stand-alone sayings, whereas the prophetic category (Q2) seems to entail heavy reference to and involvement by Jesus? Why would this content, as well as tone, divide along such lines if the two categories were contemporary, if they both existed at the same time in the community's oral library? If the content in Q1 were an ethic and practice, developed within or appropriated from outside, which constituted an integral part of the community's teaching and outlook, why would it not absorb identification with Jesus and the circumstances of his ministry, why not some hint or aspect of the prophetic and apocalyptic tenor of Q2—something which it decidedly does not?

This conundrum, therefore, points to the likelihood that the two categories represented by Q1 and Q2 do not come from the same pot of origin, and are so different in tone and expectation, in personality and attitude toward everything

from outsiders to evaluation of the world, that they must be assigned to different sources. I suggest that the material in Q1 is ultimately Cynic-derived or inspired, whereas the material in Q2 is a reflection of the actual Q community itself, its outlook and preaching personality.

In other words, the material represented by Q1 is derived from a Cynic or Cynic-like source which existed prior to the formation of the kingdom preaching movement. (Perhaps some of the initial Q people had previously been involved in such circles, or had knowledge of them.) It is impossible to know if this anterior material was in the form of the wisdom-like sayings collection we find in Q1. It may not have been. Those who did the adopting, the initial Q people, may have imposed that form upon the material, whether from some earlier written state or simply from an oral body of instructions and sayings. After all, standard scholarship adopts the position that *some* group of Jesus' followers took oral traditions about Jesus' teaching and cast it in the written collection of Q1. It thus becomes equally feasible that a kingdom-preaching group could have taken traditions or a crude written record derived from Cynic practice and philosophy, with no historical Jesus involved, and imposed upon it the Q1 form.

A Missing Jesus

This possibility is strengthened by the curious fact that no Jesus surfaces in the Q1 material—with one exception, which can be disposed of, as we shall see. If an historical Jesus was the driving, innovative force behind the movement, the originator of its sayings, the hero and leader of the Q community, why is his impact not stronger on the original stratum of material, why no incorporation of his name, his personality and background, the circumstances of his ministry? Why *were* no contexts preserved—or invented—for any of the sayings? There is something incongruous about remarks like Crossan's that the emphasis in the early Christian tradition is solely on Jesus' words and not on his person.

This void points to an initial *absence* of a figure with whom the sayings were subsequently associated. It points to a message and lifestyle not tied to any originating charismatic individual. Besides, the wide range of Q1's concerns, the telling and innovative nature of its observations, suggests that it was the product of a movement, not of a lone individual. It reflects the outlook of a group, a lifestyle followed by many. Its expression in finely-tuned aphorisms has the appearance of having been developed and honed over time. It hardly strikes one as the sudden invention of a single mind.

When one compares the Q1 sayings between their usages in Matthew and Luke, one finds that in each case the saying is placed in an entirely different context, with entirely different set-up lines. Take, for example, Luke/Q 17:5-6: "If you had faith no bigger than a mustard-seed, you could say to this sycamore tree, 'Be rooted up and replanted in the sea,' and it would obey you." Matthew, on the other hand, uses the same saying, with minor changes (17:20): "If you have faith no bigger than a mustard-seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move." But it seems unlikely that Q had presented

this saying in any context involving Jesus, for Luke places it in Jesus' mouth in response to a request by the apostles to "increase our faith," a scene taking place during Jesus' long journey toward Jerusalem. Matthew gives the saying to Jesus as an explanation for the disciples' failure to cast a devil out of an epileptic boy; his scene occurs in Galilee immediately after the Transfiguration.

The same can be said for the Lord's Prayer. This is arguably the most important and enduring thing Jesus is ever recorded to have spoken. And yet not even this had come to Q attached to a specific setting in Jesus' career. Matthew includes it in the Sermon on the Mount, delivered to vast, attentive crowds. Luke offers it during the journey to Jerusalem, a private communication at the request of the disciples who ask, "Lord, teach us how to pray."

If either of these were an isolated case, one could argue that perhaps one or both of the evangelists had simply changed the context they found in Q for their own purposes. But when the same diversity of context between Matthew and Luke is found in the case of every saying in Q1, and in virtually all of those in Q2, we must assume that this is because Q, in these early strata, was simply a list of sayings, with no associations made to a Jesus or his ministry.

A Set of Three *Chreiai*

There is, as noted, one exception: Q 9:57-62 is assigned to Q1. Although the surrounding context is different, this three-part complex of sayings has a similar structure in Matthew and Luke and contains the name "Jesus," although Matthew includes only the first two units. This has led to some doubt that Q contained the third, although most Q researchers tend to assume it did.

As they were going along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head."

To another he said, "Follow me," but he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their dead."

Yet another said, "I will follow you, sir, but first let me say goodbye to my family." Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and then looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

This is a set of three *chreiai*, remarks by an onlooker followed by responses from the teacher. Since the common part of the set is presented in essentially the same manner in both Matthew and Luke, we can assume they are copying such a formulation in Q. Yet if one compares this set to the Gospel of Thomas, we find something very revealing. The only component of the complex to be found in Thomas is saying #86: "Jesus said: 'The foxes have their holes and the birds have their nests, but the son of man has no place to lay his head and rest.'" Here it is not connected to the other chreic anecdotes, which do not appear in Thomas at all. It is not even a *chreia*, since it lacks the lead-in remark.

It is a reasonable assumption that the Thomas version, being much simpler, is the earlier form, and that the chreic formulation has been artificially constructed

later; by extension, this would suggest that the entire complex of three *chreiai* in Q1 was constructed out of earlier separate sayings. The question is, at what point was this carried out? Contrary to suggestion, it is unlikely to have been done at the time of the compilation of Q1, since that would mean the individual units were taken from the preceding source material and immediately formed into this *three-chreia* structure; whereas, we should more likely consider that the three sayings (or perhaps only two) were present separately for a time in Q, and only at a later stage were they formulated and combined in an artificial construction. While a formulation at the time of Q1 may not be impossible, we would then have to ask why such a thing was done only in this case, why the name of Jesus would have been inserted only in this single pericope. If the original compiler had an urge to introduce Jesus into one little block of sayings, why did the urge not operate on other sayings? The very fact that Jesus is not found anywhere else in Q1 suggests that he should not be considered to have been introduced here.

Dissenters also argue from the other direction. They claim that this *three-chreia* construction could not have been done at a later Q2 or Q3 stage since it does not reflect any Q2 or Q3 interests. There is, for example, nothing prophetic about them, they do not express a polemic against unrepentant outsiders, nor do they witness to persecution; it is these things which identify material belonging to the Q2 stratum. But this is surely straightjacketing one's methodology. There is nothing to prevent earlier material from being recast or tinkered with in later phases, and no necessity that such changes must be such as to reflect the central characteristics of those phases. In this case, the subject matter is discipleship, and no introduction of prophetic or polemical intent would have been either automatic or necessary, especially when older material was being reworked rather than entirely new material introduced. Besides, just because discipleship is one of the dominant Q1 themes does not mean that it ceased to be of any interest or application in later phases of the community. It is true that stratification within Q is largely determined by the character and thematic content of the individual sayings, but if another factor can be perceived at work prompting reorganization, then one must be open to flexibility. That factor, pointed to by many features to be examined, was the introduction of an historical founding figure only later in the community's development.

In sum, if the three-chreic unit can reasonably be seen as a later construction, it is possible to maintain that in all likelihood the name "Jesus" (or a founder by any name) was entirely absent within the original Q1 stratum.

More Set-Up Lines

It was noted that the individual sayings in Q, and especially Q1, seem to have stood alone, lacking any set-up lines which would indicate a context involving a Jesus or his ministry, since Matthew and Luke's uses of these sayings regularly involve their own different contexts and lead-ins. A number of objections have been raised here.¹²⁵ First, in regard to the three-chreic unit of Luke/Q 9:57-62 just discussed, the three sayings relating to discipleship, it is maintained that the

lead-ins which introduce Jesus' words are required to make that sense clear; thus this is an indicator that the lead-ins would have been supplied at the very formation of Q1. But how valid is this contention? Taken by themselves, perhaps only the third clearly indicates that the saying was about the demands of discipleship, the need for separation from one's former life, although the other two would probably suggest it. But there are other sayings in Q1 whose contextual significance is not only lacking but uncertain. "Can a blind man lead a blind man, will they both not fall into a pit?" (Q 6:39). "Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known" (Q 12:2-3). These are nothing if not enigmatic. The latter is given a context in Luke by a reference to the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. Matthew includes it in Jesus' mission instructions to his disciples (10:26) to assuage their fear of the authorities. Neither context throws much light on the saying itself.

Moreover, we can take note that in the Gospel of Thomas, most of its sayings stand alone with no explanatory context whatever. In fact, the saying in the first of the three Q *chreiai* is one of them (#86), which by itself must have meant something to the Thomas community and needed no lead-in. What is overlooked is that, regardless of the uncertainty that may be present in our modern reading of the text, those living in the actual *Sitz-im-Leben* of the community probably had no trouble recognizing the significance of the sayings without an accompanying explanation.

Zeichman (see note 125) also appeals to little lead-in lines to various sayings and clusters which are thought by Q researchers to have been in Q. Typical is the case of Matthew's Sermon on the Mount and Luke's Sermon on the Plain:

Matthew 5:2 - And opening his mouth he taught them, saying:

Luke 6:20 - Lifting up his eyes to his disciples, he said:

There is no common wording between the two other than the verb 'say,' yet it is proposed that some kind of introductory phrase stood there in Q which would need to have entailed mention of Jesus or the circumstances in his ministry. But both Matthew and Luke in any event would have required some introduction to their Sermons and could independently have come up with what we see here; there need have been no prompting by Q itself. And if there *had* been something in Q, it may have been no more than a "Jesus said" such as we find in Thomas—which, like Thomas, could very well have been added at a later stage.

Another "doubly-attested introduction," this one to the parable of the mustard seed, is said to be found in Matthew 13:31 ("He told them another parable:") and Luke 13:18 ("Then he said:") This requires no further comment than that already made. Zeichman suggests that such things were "necessary to the coherence of the Q text, noting shifts in audience and frequently introducing clusters." But there is no required "coherence" of this sort in a sayings collection, which is why it is a sayings collection and not a narrative. These are Gospel assumptions being introduced where they do not belong; they create circularity in first assuming Q1 was some kind of narrative-based record and then declaring lead-in lines that are thereby required.

This is hardly compelling evidence that Q1 contained elements identifying a Jesus figure and a setting in his ministry. And scholars offering reconstructions of Q are far from unanimous in proposing that these lead-ins were present. The weakness of such proposals highlights the fact that no case can be made that Q, beyond a couple of Q2 anecdotes, contained identifying context elements.

Explaining the Muting of Jesus

Throughout any book or article on Q there is always a recognition of the fact that little about Jesus himself is to be found in the Q1 stratum. This must be accommodated, but the means found to do so is often marked by questionable reasoning. The standard method, in fact, is simply to read Jesus into the text. The Q specialist William Arnal may serve as an example of this procedure, and observations will periodically be made in his direction. In his article "The Q Document" (see note 118), he states (p.3) that

[T]he document's first layer and earliest written stage (Q1) presents Jesus as a teacher of unusual wisdom, and exhorts obedience to his radical teaching and emulation of the lifestyle that accompanies that teaching.

He points to sayings like Q 14:26 ("If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother. ..(he) cannot be a disciple of mine") and Q 6:46 ("Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord' and not do what I say?"). But here the identification with Jesus lies entirely in first person pronouns within sayings that have been assumed to come from him. That assumption, once the three-chreic construction is rendered suspect, is not supported by anything else which the text of Q1 actually says. And we will see later that there is good indication that such personal pronouns are the product of a later stage of redaction.

At the same time, Arnal makes this observation:

Jesus is in theory not qualitatively different from any other teacher; he is not explicitly invested with any supernatural qualities or unique titles....Jesus stands—here as in later stages of Q—as a *primus inter pares* [first among equals], the most important exemplar of activity (in this case, wisdom teaching) that others can and do undertake as well, including those actually responsible for Q.

This is an extremely momentous admission, because it opens a key door. If the Q community does not treat Jesus as an exalted figure (let alone as deified Son of God), if they allot to him no more than what the Q preachers themselves are and do, then there is no impediment to seeing him as merely *symbolic* of them. Even more significantly, there is no impediment to postulating, based on specific evidence in Q, that earlier versions of many sayings embodied a *group* reference, lost when the Jesus figure was introduced and elements like pronouns were changed to assign such sayings to him personally.

Arnal claims that Jesus is renowned as a teacher, and that Q1 is dedicated to promoting his sayings. And yet at the same time he acknowledges that important aspects of that teaching, as recorded in the Gospels, are missing from the Q

catalogue. Q1 has nothing to say about Jesus' teaching on the Jewish dietary laws; in fact, they are noticeably excluded from consideration in its mission statement (Lk./Q 10:1-12) which says:

"Stay in that one house, sharing their food and drink; for the worker earns his pay."

No thought is given to whether the host is Jewish or gentile (an option to be expected in Galilee and Syria), or whether his food is kosher or not; this seems not to be an issue, nor are the missionaries reminded of Jesus' liberal teachings on the subject. Similarly, no mention is made of the issue of circumcision; if gentiles are approached, what is to be the rule on this traditional requirement? Another issue in the Gospels is the degree of observance of the Sabbath, on which Jesus also had liberal views. Neither it nor Jesus' teaching on the subject is ever raised in Q. All these features came to be present in Mark and the other Synoptics because they were now dealing with a presumed historical figure who was in the process of being fleshed out in narrative fashion in several directions.

Incidentally, these observations compromise any claim that the Q community was made up of ethnic Jews who felt a commitment to mainstream Jewish traditions. Rather, it supports the option that it comprised a mix of cosmopolitan Jews and gentiles. Since no issue is raised as to which ethnicity the missionaries are required to approach or limit themselves to, let alone detailing Jesus' views on this, we may assume that it was open season for all comers (even if a natural emphasis may have lain on Jews), further indicating the lack of specifically Jewish concerns within the community.

Arnal analyzes the features of Q1 in comparison with those of other Jesus movements of the 1st century. He finds a surprising dearth of markers to indicate that it is to be included in "that wide-ranging class of first-century ideological discourses that appealed to the figure of Jesus" (p.9). In fact, he identifies only three in Q1. Two are relatively undistinctive: belief in the God of Israel and the practice of referring to each other by the term "brother." The remaining one is "an interest in Jesus." And yet, that is precisely what is missing, or at least perplexingly truncated. If the community has an interest in Jesus, why is it so narrowly limited to the bare sayings, and to only one class of sayings—one with an almost unrecognizable Jewish character? Why does it not extend to an interest in his life and the circumstances of his ministry and death? Is Arnal not guilty of reading "an interest in Jesus" into Q1 when a more clear-eyed view would see that he is not there?

Borrowing from the Cynics

Before going on to Q2, we may ask why and how a predominantly Jewish kingdom-preaching sect in Galilee would have come to borrow a set of principles and ethics from a gentile source. Answering such questions must appeal to some degree of speculation. Simple human contact is one of the basic modes of travel for all manner of ideas, and historians of all periods postulate the transfer of such ideas through the movement of people. The influence, for

example, of Indian Buddhism on more westerly societies is often postulated. The exile of Jews to Babylon and their return to a restored Israel is considered the cause of a considerable absorption of Iranian ideas within Judaism after the exile. And so on. All it may take is one influential individual exposed to new or foreign ideas to start a sect. (We have enough examples of a similar process in modern times.) The point is, a Cynic derivation for the adopted ethics of a new Hellenistic-Jewish sect in Galilee can hardly be ruled out on the basis of the claim that Cynicism is 'foreign' to Jews, or that we do not have census reports showing a requisite number of Cynics living or preaching in northern Palestine.

Besides, there would have been many common interests between Cynics and some Jewish sects. Both were preaching a kingdom of God which involved a desired reversal of fortune and social interaction. Judaism had a long history of being concerned with reform and egalitarian impulses. Both the Q movement and the Cynics were gadflies challenging the establishment. Thus one can readily envision a Cynic ethos exercising great appeal to a fledgling kingdom of God movement. Such allowances could be said to pull us back toward a Galilean Jesus who would have reflected characteristics paralleled in local or nearby Cynic expressions. But then we still face the absence of a single and charismatic "Cynic-style sage" in the early record, as well as the positive evidence within Q itself that a founder figure was introduced only at a later stage. Besides, such a Jesus—or whatever his name might have been—would carry us far from the parameters of the Christian hero and Son of God subscribed to by two millennia of western thinking.

A Fire in the Belly

On entering Q2, one encounters a startling change of atmosphere.

"This is a wicked generation. It demands a sign, and the only sign that will be given to it is the sign of Jonah."

"Woe to you Pharisees. You are like graves over which men may walk without knowing it... You build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers murdered."

"Do you suppose I have come to establish peace on earth? No, I have come to bring division."

"There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and yourselves thrown out."

"Hold yourselves ready, then, because the Son of Man is coming at the time you least expect him."

"And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to hell!"

It is difficult if not impossible to regard the same community, the same set of people—not to mention the same man—as having produced the two sets of sayings, the one reflecting an enlightened lifestyle of tolerance, accommodation, mutual respect, trust in a benevolent God, the other a fire-breathing, intolerant

outburst of vindictiveness. How best, then, to explain the juxtaposition of the two groups of sayings in the same document?

The explanation that Q2 represents a later time, at which the same group of people who produced—on their own—Q1 are reacting to rejection and hostility, seems inadequate. Arnal puts that explanation in classic form:

The call to heed Jesus' teachings issued in Q1 has been ignored, and so the purveyors of the Q material retreat into condemnation of those who have rejected their original message.

In other words, Arnal and others envision that the kingdom movement existed for a time in the state of mind and personality reflected in Q1: expounding their message of equanimity and justice and trust in God the provider. Only after a time during which that message was rejected did the mood change.

This is dubious. It is not merely a case of a different personality and mode of expression. Q2 reflects an apocalyptically oriented mind and community, one which prophesies the coming of the Son of Man and a terrible judgment. That type of orientation and mindset does not suddenly displace a previous state of functioning without it, no matter what the provocation. Q1 lacks any sense of apocalyptic outlook or prophetic orientation, and it is hard to believe that such features would have been absent from Q1 if the kingdom sect itself had been the author, for it would have possessed a general apocalyptic orientation and outlook from the beginning. It is one thing to adopt an outside source which may not reflect important elements of one's own agenda but can still serve a useful purpose; it is quite another to create and set down something oneself which lacks those important elements. Moreover, while the assumed context of Q1 seems to be one of proselytizing, it contains no sense of drama and urgency and a need for large-scale conversion such as we find in the Q2 stratum, yet another missing feature suggesting that the kingdom people were not the authors of Q1.

The way Arnal puts it raises another aspect to what is missing in Q1. If the Q people were issuing a "call to heed Jesus' teachings," this would necessarily have entailed a preaching of the man himself. If the new ethic is the product of an individual, then a clear asset to that call would have been the personality and circumstances of the man who produced it. The community's preaching would inevitably have involved such things as an adjunct to the sayings themselves, and some reflection of the biography and person of Jesus would be included in the record of Q1. Not only are they entirely missing there, we are hard enough put to find them even in Q2.

On the relationship between Q1 and Q2, what is required is a reorientation of interpretation. Q2 represents the *activity* of the kingdom sect *from its beginning*; the sayings are its product. Q1, on the other hand, represents an ethic largely derived from an outside source, adopted and somewhat adapted by the sect also at its beginning; it served as a set of principles and expectations the community sought to live by, a prescription for the members of the community to follow until the arrival of the Son of Man and the kingdom of God. In fact, this would eliminate yet another contradiction entailed in the standard view. Kloppenborg,

Arnal and others have pointed out that the nature of the Q1 sayings orients them *inward* toward the sect itself, not outward. It is more than a little incongruous to think of them as constituting a preaching message to society as a whole.

By contrast, the Q2 sayings are oriented outward. They are a combination of the actual teachings of the sect to outsiders—the call to repentance and the announcement of the coming kingdom with the arrival of the Son of Man—and an expression of the frustration which the sect has come to feel after a certain amount of time has elapsed, with disappointing success. But we must assume that the message of repentance in the face of the imminent kingdom was there from the beginning, and probably forcefully delivered.

However, the material in Q2 would not have been set down in writing or added to an existing document until after a passage of time. Any literary product embodying a group's experiences always has a history behind it, a preceding period during which the approaches and reactions are formulated and a record of them takes shape. What that period of time was in the case of the kingdom sect would be difficult if not impossible to calculate, perhaps years or even a decade or more. While Q2 embodies the beliefs and activities of the group from the beginning, the sentiments of antagonism it expresses come later; they are separate from the principles it adopted in Q1. When the former was added to the latter in the same document, the two stood side by side in all their incongruity. The precise form and combination Q would have had at any redactive stage, the precise form of its individual sayings, would also be difficult to determine, for further additions and revisions still lay ahead.¹²⁶

Does Q2 Know of a Founder Jesus?

So far we have called into question the idea that a single person lay at the inception of the Q1 sayings, whether a Jewish Jesus or any other. When Q2 is combined with Q1, does the picture of a Jesus emerge more clearly?

This is more difficult to determine, since following the initial stage of Q2's addition to Q1, it is not always possible to be sure when or where further revision has been made. Q scholars have established a Q3 level, but they do not consistently agree on exactly what this constitutes, how much revision of older material went on subsequent to Q2. (Kloppenborg sees only two or three units as belonging to Q3, Burton Mack a few more.) But the first thing to observe is that, like Q1, most of the sayings of the prophetic Q2 layer also seem to have lacked contexts, a specific association with Jesus' ministry or mention of his name. Matthew and Luke incorporate each saying into their Gospels using different lead-in material and placing them at different points in their Gospel story. This leads to the conclusion that, as with Q1, they have supplied their own contexts because none were present in Q itself.

For example, compare Luke 11:29 and Matthew 12:38-39:

Luke: With the crowds swarming around him, he [Jesus] went on to say: "This is a wicked generation. It demands a sign, and the only sign that will be given to it is the sign of Jonah."

Matthew: At this, some of the doctors of the law and the Pharisees said, "Master, we should like you to show us a sign." He answered: "It is a wicked, godless generation that asks for a sign...."

Only the saying itself is common between the two. Evidently no context appeared in Q. As pointed out earlier in regard to the Q1 layer, one or two cases of this would not be conclusive; but if virtually every case exhibits the same phenomenon, one is permitted to draw a conclusion. Different contexts, different set-up lines are supplied by each evangelist. Moreover, if the saying in the quote above, about the generation that demands a sign, is taken by itself, one sees that there is no specific attribution to Jesus, and no setting as part of a story in which it is placed.

Consider another example. Luke/Q 22:28-30 says that the faithful followers of Jesus will "sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Apparently the apostles who received this assurance did not transmit it in the context in which they heard it. For it is used during the Last Supper in Luke as part of Jesus' words to his disciples, but during Jesus' passage into Judea in Matthew, answering a question from Peter (19:27-28). Here, however, we have in both versions of the passage a reference by the speaker to himself; this will prove revealing in another direction.

Narration or dialogue in Matthew and Luke involving apostles, Pharisees or onlookers who serve to keep a chain of sayings going as an unfolding scene are never remotely similar between the two evangelists. Outside of two extended anecdotes to be examined, this situation holds true for all sayings which can reliably be regarded as coming from either Q1 or Q2. Clearly, Q provided no narrative settings for any of these individual or clusters of sayings. The evangelists appear to have worked with skeletal raw material.

Yet why would such sayings, particularly those considered to be authentic, have been consistently preserved and transmitted with nothing to identify them with Jesus? Why would the compilers, whether of Q1 or Q2, especially at the earlier levels when they would have been closer to Jesus' memory, not have recorded or developed contexts which involved even his name? We may offer as an explanation that such sayings had been spoken by the prophets of the Q community itself—and were originally recorded or assumed as such—and only later became attributed to a newly-developed founder figure. That figure does, in fact, put in an appearance in a later phase, in sayings which need, in their extant form, to constitute a stratum of their own. For that phase, to be examined in Part Eight, the term Q3 will be pressed into service.¹²⁷

The Role of John the Baptist

In addition to the lack of settings and identification with Jesus, there are other indications that no Jesus lay in the background of the original Q2 stratum.

In the opening units of Q, telling of John the Baptist's preaching about the coming retribution, there is no identifiable reference to Jesus. Instead, John makes this prediction (Lk./Q 3:16-17):

"But there is one to come who is mightier than I. I am not fit to unfasten his shoes. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His shovel is ready in his hand, to winnow his threshing-floor and gather the wheat into his granary; but he will burn the chaff on a fire that can never go out."

Is this a prediction of the enlightened teacher of Q1? Would the Q2 compilers have considered this an adequate representation of their founder and preacher of Wisdom? Or did this saying, when initially formulated, refer rather to John the Baptist's prophecy of the coming Son of Man, the apocalyptic judge who would baptize with fire and perform a ghastly separation of the wheat from the chaff?

The reference to "shoes" need not imply a human being. In fact, this particular image was a metaphor signifying a slave/master relationship and the vast gulf which existed between the two, and could easily be used in reference to a divine figure. On the other hand, Kloppenborg notes (*Formation of Q*, p. 104) that the phrase about 'untying his shoes' has been recognized as intrusive, and that it may have been added at a later stage to emphasize John's inferiority to Jesus; in this case, it would have been a reference to a perceived human being.

This does not mean that John the Baptist would actually have preached the apocalyptic Son of Man, who is a figure restricted to documents written in the second half of the 1st century. (Some have suggested that John might have preached the coming of God himself on the Day of the Lord in terms such as these.) Rather, this appears to be the Q community bringing John into its own ranks and imputing to him what they themselves were preaching.

The Baptist in Q is clearly speaking of someone he regards as a future judge. Kloppenborg himself is under no illusion that John in 3:17 is speaking of Jesus, or of anyone on the scene.

Q opens with the specter of a baptizing ascetic proclaiming the imminent judgment of God and the demand for repentance (3:7-9, 16-17). At first blush, there seems to be little affinity between this figure and Jesus....The prediction of the coming apocalyptic figure—either God himself or some supra-human (angelic?) figure—is arguably of Baptist provenance since the title *ho erchomenos* is obviously Christian and since the description of that figure accords so poorly with the activity of Jesus. [*The Formation of Q*, p.95, 104]

The preaching of John about the 'coming one' (Lk./Q 3:7-9 and 16-17—while Matthew runs the two together) is generally judged to have been the opening pericope in the finished Q. It would represent the point at which the new body of sayings was added to Q1, since providing a description of the perceived beginnings of the movement and the figure of the one whose preaching set it in motion would be a natural element to include from the start, when the record of the movement's experiences was being put down in writing and added to the earlier body of sayings. At such a point, it would seem that the community knew of no founding figure in its background, for if it did, it would not have created for John a saying which shows no knowledge of such a figure.¹²⁸

Kloppenborg's observation that John is here not speaking of Jesus or any figure on the scene creates a serious problem in light of a later Q anecdote involving John and Jesus, but that will be left for a later chapter when we examine the introduction of a founder Jesus into Q.

Luke/Q 16:16 is another pericope about the Baptist which strongly suggests that no such founder existed in the Q mind within the formative content of Q2. Matthew's version in 11:12 follows.

"Until John, it was the law and the prophets; since then, there is the good news of the Kingdom of God, and everyone forces his way in."

"From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and violent men are seizing it."

Q scholars regard Matthew as closer to the Q original, although both evangelists have adapted the saying to their own purposes and contexts. But consider what is missing here. When the saying first originated, we can safely regard it as the community looking back over its history; the implied time scale is too great for it to be claimed as an authentic saying of Jesus, or one accorded to him, commenting on the brief span of his own ministry to date. This is Q's picture of the past, a past of years, perhaps decades. Placing it in Jesus' mouth has proven problematic.

According to the saying, before the preaching of John the Baptist—now looked upon as a forerunner or mentor to the community's own—the study of scripture formed the prevailing activity and source of inspiration. Now a new movement is perceived to have arisen at the time of John: the preaching of the coming kingdom of God, and it had inaugurated an era of contention. But why would Jesus himself not have been seen in this role? Surely the Q community would have regarded *his* ministry as the turning point from the old to the new. The saying would almost certainly have formed around *him*. At the very least, Jesus would have been linked with John as representing the time of change.

Thus, in regard to both Baptist references, Q2's picture of its past lacks a Jesus at the critical point where he would be most expected to appear: at the movement's beginning.

The Killing of the Prophets

But he is also missing in another essential role. Consider Luke/Q 11:49:

"This is why the Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and messengers; and some of these they will persecute and kill,' so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, will have to be answered for by this generation...."

It is more than strange that such a saying would have been formulated with no mention of Jesus. Surely he, the Son of God, or at least the movement's founder and source of its teachings, would be seen as the most important of those whom Wisdom had sent. Moreover, this saying reflects Q2's strong emotional focus on the great myth of the time among sectarian groups (part of the "deuteronomistic

theology"), that the Jewish leaders had a long history of killing God's prophets and messengers and they would have to bear God's punishment for it. This is the paramount focus of the Q2 stratum, since the Q community is placing itself in that category. As Kloppenborg, quoting Arland Jacobson, puts it (*op.cit.*, p.93):

Israel's history is pictured as a history of disobedience. God in his forbearance sent warning to the people through the prophets, yet they rejected and even killed the prophets. Therefore God's wrath was—or will be—experienced. References to the prophets are a recurring but not a constant element in the deuteronomistic tradition; the rejection of the prophets is cited as simply one indication of the stiff-neckedness of the people....It is noteworthy that the guilt of the fathers is said to remain even up to the present.

And yet neither here nor anywhere else in Q is there even an allusion to the persecution and killing of the greatest of these: Jesus himself. Given this paramount focus in Q2, it is unthinkable that the compilers would not have found a way to include the most dramatic example of their central concern over the killing of God's prophets. As noted earlier, the argument that Jesus would not yet have died when these words were supposedly spoken by him has little force, for Christian writers were quite adept at bringing in anticipation of future events, either through direct prophecy spoken by Jesus or through parables. If Mark had no compunction about having Jesus openly prophesy his death to his disciples, or providing parables which alluded to it, why not the Q2 redactor—especially if any such traditions had any pre-Markan existence?

Besides, Luke 11:49 is judged as reflecting the original Q form, with Wisdom the speaker of the oracle. Kloppenborg refers (*op.cit.*, p.144) to this as a "saying of Sophia speaking, apparently from her standpoint at the beginning of history." Since the Wisdom of God, in such a position, would have had no impediment to forecasting the future—indeed, she is doing precisely that with the oracle as it stands—she could very well have included a reference to the killing of Jesus.

The 11:49 saying speaks of "this generation (that) will have to answer for all the blood of all the prophets." And yet this generation has not been accused of the greatest blood of all. The saying includes the allotted span of Jewish responsibility for such blood: "from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who perished between the altar and the sanctuary." This Zechariah is generally thought to be a reference to the 2 Chronicles prophet, a pre-exilic figure, or possibly the prophet of the biblical book of that name who lived shortly after the exile. Either one is a rather distant cut-off (a *terminus ad quern*) for Wisdom's listing of murdered prophets. (Kloppenborg makes a similar observation.) Could a Q compiler who knew of the death of Jesus have settled for describing "the blood of all the prophets shed since the foundation of the world" as having ended several centuries previously?

It might be claimed that the reason why Q2 made no mention of its Jesus as having been the latest in a long line of prophets killed by the Jewish establishment was because Q had no concept of him having been so killed. But

scholarship has not yet been willing to accept this as a possibility, for it would have serious consequences on the orthodox Christian picture, and so there has been no recourse to this explanation.¹²⁹

Reading Jesus into Q

William Arnal (*op.cit.*[see note 118], p.5) in the face of the apparent silence in Q about Jesus' death, suggests that in light of 14:27, Jesus' death "does seem to be taken for granted." He also notes that "Jesus' resurrection...is not referred to explicitly," but he reads it into Q by the dubious process of regarding its references to the 'coming' of the Son of Man or "Coming One" as meaning the "return" of Jesus (no expression of "return" is found in Q), which allegedly implies that the dead Jesus (nowhere said to have died) "will not remain dead."

Q accords Jesus' death no special salvific significance, but jumps immediately to Jesus' return as the Son of Man....When resurrection language is used in Q, it is not applied to Jesus, but to figures from Israel's epic past....What we have here is a notion of collective universal resurrection of the just and the wicked, to be vindicated or condemned at that final moment. The personalized, unique character of the resurrection of Jesus is nowhere to be seen, just as the individual, exceptional and salvific notion of his death is absent.

The anomaly raised by those two final sentences should be evident. If Q shows an interest in a universal resurrection, how can we explain its utter disinterest in Jesus' own resurrection, to the point of acknowledging that "it is nowhere to be seen"? Part of the argument—just as we see in Pauline passages like 1 Corinthians 15:12—would surely be an appeal to the resurrection of Jesus. Either we must see a complete detachment between the faith content of this particular 'Jesus movement' and that of the Pauline type, or Q knows of no Jesus who could be identified with our Christian Christ.

Arnal provides us with further examples of the type of rationalization that must be adopted to account for such striking anomalies:

Turning to the other side of the ledger, Q seems to *lack* almost as many indices of the ancient Jesus-movements as it possesses, and rather important ones at that. One striking absence is Q's complete failure to conceptualize Jesus in terms of the *kerygma* of death and resurrection. The reference to the cross in Q 14:27 is so vague that it cannot even be demonstrated that it refers to Jesus' particular mode of execution; it most certainly does not present Jesus' death as a unique salvific act. Nor is there any reference in Q to Jesus as "Christ" (*christos*), perhaps the most distinctive of the titular honors attributed to Jesus by Paul, the gospel-writers, and later Christians, [p. 10]

With these things recognized as not obviously present in Q, Arnal has offered a distinctive explanation. They are in fact present, but they are subsumed in Q's picture of itself. He quotes Kloppenborg, followed by his own corroborating comment:

"Even at the main redactional phase (Q2), where christological statements are more in evidence, these remain embedded in a broader strategy of defending the ethos of the Q group and threatening those who are seen as opponents" (Kloppenborg-Verbin 2000, 392). In short, the fate of Jesus is an aspect of the *collective* experience of rejection on the part of divine Wisdom's emissaries; thus is Jesus' death assimilated to and deployed within the framework of Q's deuteronomistic theology, and its singular, once-and-for-all character not asserted."

There can be no better example of the scholarly recourse of reading into a document something which cannot be accepted as absent. An evident omission is explained by finding—or rather constructing—a backdoor by which to introduce it. Jesus and his experiences are present in Q in the persons and experiences of the Q preachers. He is one of a "collective." He is "embedded" in, "assimilated to" the "broader ethos of the Q group." *He thus becomes something which is undifferentiated from a symbol for the Q community*, and in fact we now have no way of telling the difference between the Q mind with a Jesus and the Q mind without a Jesus. He is no longer recognizable on his own.

In any case, is it reasonable that a 'Jesus movement' would 'assimilate and deploy' the death of Jesus into the community's own experience so that it is completely lost sight of? What reason could the Q people have had for doing such a thing, especially when it would have been a simple and advantageous matter to introduce these aspects of Jesus into the equation? If Jesus can reputedly be present in the form of his own teachings to support the community's ethic, why cannot he, and his own death, be there to enhance the community's focus on the deuteronomistic theology involving the killing of the prophets?

Arnal does the same where the Q miracles are concerned:

In no instance does Q seem to have an interest in miracles as such, and while it takes for granted Jesus' reputation as a healer, it does not develop this motif or treat it as central to his agenda. Nor are Jesus' healings unique: the Q people themselves are enjoined to heal the sick as part of *their* proclamation and demonstration of the kingdom of God.

Once again, any uniqueness in Jesus' activities has been subsumed and buried in the activities of the Q preachers. No distinctive portrayal of them is in evidence. With the exception of the healing of the centurion's servant (7:1-10), these miracles are not even narrated; their mention serves only to highlight the failure of those witnessing them to repent. If the Q people knew of a Jesus, and that he performed miracles, this should have led to the opposite: that a focus would be placed on both the miracles and the miracle-worker to accentuate their point, that the kingdom was being heralded by these healings and that they were being performed not just by anybody but by a special emissary from God.

Their low-key treatment shows that they originally related to no one higher than the community's claims for itself. Had a Jesus been in mind from the first, they would have assumed a much greater significance and portrayal. All of this

supports the contention that the elements of Q2 had an initial application to the Q preachers generally and only later were assigned to a representative figure, although one of the things to be decided is the degree of reality that was assigned to that figure in the Q eye when he arrived on the scene.

Arnal recognizes another anomaly but not its profound consequences. If there is a bottom-line theme in Q2, it is the condemnation of "this generation" for not responding to the message. "Woe to you!" is their warning. Scholars recognize (and this, of course, has been the assumption here) that, whether the sayings are in the mouth of a Jesus or not, Q2 represents a post-Jesus time and set of circumstances. One must not confuse Q with the Gospels and their narrative setting. Q has no overall narrative structure. It almost exclusively contains only sayings which stand by themselves and cannot be clearly demonstrated to have been, at the Q1 and basic Q2 level, assigned to a Jesus; in fact all indicators are that they were not. Thus Q cannot be interpreted as dealing with the present through a narrative about the past. But Q's exclusive focus on "this generation" as the repudiators of the message, as those who will suffer for rejecting God's prophets, leaves a great void in the picture. Arnal admits that Q represents "an articulation of what the authors/compiler of Q felt needed to be said in their own time" (p. 13). But this involves the dismissal of what ought to have been said about another time, the time a generation or so earlier, when that previous generation had rejected Jesus himself, his own words spoken by himself, his own witness through his miracles to the arrival of the kingdom.

Arnal seems to recognize the point, but simply disregards it. "The castigation of 'this generation'...is not a retrospective or narrative characterization of those who might have ignored Jesus in the past." The sayings of Q reflect a "contemporizing"; they possess features "much more immediate than we would expect from a 'historical' narrative of past events, such as we encounter in the canonical gospels" (p. 13). In other words, Q's focus is entirely on the present and makes no attempt to relate it to any past situation, not even the natural one involving Jesus in his own ministry. But simply stating such a thing does not make it acceptable as an explanation for Q ignoring the career of Jesus itself, for ignoring the past generation that was as guilty as the present one (if not more) of rejecting and killing God's prophets, and as deserving of their comeuppance. Arnal's comments are the same as those, as we have seen, who dismiss similar voids by declaring that this or that epistle writer 'had no interest' in mentioning a given point which we should have every right to expect would indeed have been of interest. This very argument on Arnal's part belies his own claim that one of the features of Q1, and of Q as a whole, is that it "had an interest in Jesus." He has just given us a wealth of evidence and comment that in fact they did not.

The Son of Man in Q

The Galilean preaching movement was announcing the imminent arrival of the kingdom of God. Society was being urged to repent before that day came. But the Q preachers were also warning that an apocalyptic judge was on the way

to inaugurate the kingdom: the Son of Man. It was he whom John the Baptist had allegedly forecast, the one who would baptize with fire. Here are some of the things which the Q preachers had to say about this ominous heavenly figure:

11:30 - For as Jonah become a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation.

12:40 - For the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

17:24-27 - For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day... As it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. They ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.... But on the day when Lot went out from Sodom fire and brimstone rained from heaven and destroyed them all; so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed.

There is perhaps no other element of the Gospels that has produced so much debate, uncertainty and confusion than the concept of the Son of Man. It is ranked at or very near the top of the list of greatest conundrums in Gospel research. It is agreed that the term and concept, when used in an apocalyptic context, derives ultimately from the "one like a son of man" who appears before the throne of God in Daniel 7:13. There it symbolized the righteous of Israel who would be given dominion over the earth. But a figure referred to by that name crops up in several literary settings in the second half of the 1st century CE, both Jewish and Christian: the most prominent for Christian purposes being in Q and from there graduating to the Gospels. Rather than being a widespread popular myth of the day, the Son of Man is regarded as having been the diverse result of different readings of Daniel by several sects in the mid to late 1st century.

To complicate matters, the phrase "son of man" appears in the Gospels and Q in contexts which have no apocalyptic or prophetic dimension. This usage was undoubtedly a separate one, derived from the biblical practice of using the phrase simply to mean "man." In Semitic parlance of the time the phrase was further used in idiomatic fashion as a euphemism for oneself. ('What does a son of man have to do to get some respect around here?') This has led a thread of scholarship to postulate that this is all the phrase meant in Jesus' mouth, that no apocalyptic significance was ever intended in such a self-reference, and his apostles or the later Church introduced such an understanding to the term. If Q or the Gospels had Jesus talk about the coming Son of Man, it was simply a more dramatic way of referring to Jesus in his future apocalyptic role when he would come at the Parousia, derived from Jesus' own self-referencing practice.

But this conclusion has been backed into, and from the wrong direction. It first assumes that Jesus in his ministry used the phrase of himself, particularly—if not exclusively—in those sayings involving the term in the non-apocalyptic sense of "man" or as a self-referent; this was supposedly its original usage and the apocalyptic application grew later out of that, in sayings which Jesus probably never pronounced. But we need instead to approach it from the other direction. Since Q came before the Gospels, consideration ought to start from

that earlier pre-Gospel phase. If we do not retroject Gospel preconceptions into Q, what does Q by itself tell us about the term?

In Q1 it appears once, in the saying of 9:58 about "the son of man" having nowhere to lay his head. Here the term should not be capitalized and treated as a title, for it merely suggests the meaning of "man"—or, if one envisions a specific human behind it, a self-referent, possibly in the context of a Q prophet's life. But in Q2, a figure by that name emerges with a vengeance. He is an ominous one whose day is coming. John the Baptist warns of his winnowing shovel. The Son of Man himself, when he arrives, will be the sign given to this generation; and his arrival will be at an hour least expected. The consistent tenor of these sayings and dire warnings is that this is a thoroughly heavenly figure, God's judge; he is not someone who has been here or is here presently. It is hardly to be thought that this concept and title were derived from someone's use of an innocuous euphemism or traditional biblical phrase. The biggest factor in creating the so-called Son of Man 'problem' has been the *a priori* associating of the Q Son of Man with the Q Jesus and thus the Jesus of the Gospels. That association came later (and perhaps *only* with the Gospels). It may have been made possible in part by the presence of those few sayings in which the term referred simply to a 'man' or man in general, prompting its later identification with someone who had been on the scene.

But the Q2 sayings about the Son of Man in the apocalyptic sense clearly do not refer to someone who is or had been on earth, but only to a divine entity due to arrive from Heaven in the future. Not only that, when they were placed in the mouth of the eventual founding figure we find later in Q, they create the impression that the latter is speaking of someone else. That same impression is carried over into the Gospels, an indicator that their original sense did not entail a reference to anyone present, or ever present, on the kingdom preaching scene. The Son of Man is being preached; he is not being recorded as having preached himself. (Matthew attempts to eliminate that incongruous effect by on occasion changing the Son of Man to a direct pronoun "I" or "me" in Jesus' mouth.)

That inevitable realization is yet another indicator that during the formative period of Q2, no Jesus existed within the community's thinking.

The Synoptic Son of Man

Mark, of course, also presents sayings and traditions about the apocalyptic Son of Man (which he identifies with his Jesus) and all of these were taken over from him by Matthew and Luke. These he did not take from a Q document, which he shows no sign of possessing. But they once again witness to Mark's exposure to Q-type traditions because Mark himself would have belonged to a community which was part of the wider kingdom-preaching movement. In the apocalyptic sense, Mark has Jesus refer to himself as the Son of Man who will come in the future: as part of his predictions to his disciples (13:26) and in his retort to the High Priest (14:62). These contain Danielic motifs such as coming on the clouds of heaven. Q2 might have contained a saying of this sort, but we

have no independent witness to it since Matthew and Luke have taken their versions from Mark. (Mark also refers to the Son of Man coming in 8:38, but an extra element in both Matthew and Luke suggests that this saying was indeed present in Q, but that Mark is familiar with it only in a simpler form.)

Mark's catalogue contains two "son of man" sayings which are self-references to Jesus' activities on earth: that the son of man has the power to forgive sins (2:10), that he is lord of the Sabbath (2:28). Whether these were previously sayings which Mark knew from the kingdom community, perhaps relating to the Q preachers themselves who might have claimed such things, is difficult to say. If there were versions in Q2, they have been concealed behind Matthew and Luke's dependence on Mark for these sentiments.

Mark also contains a third class of Son of Man sayings, those predicting his suffering and death (as in 8:31):

And he began to teach them that the Son of Man had to undergo great sufferings, and to be rejected by the elders, chief priests and doctors of the Law; to be put to death and to rise three days afterwards.

Compare also 9:31 and 10:33. And 10:45: "the Son of Man came to serve (as) a ransom for many." These, too, have been taken over by Matthew and Luke. However, we can be sure that sayings like these were not included in Q, since Q, as we have seen, shows no knowledge of or interest in the death of a founder figure. And by their very nature, they belong entirely within Mark's plot line. Mark has invented them himself to create a thread in his ministry depiction which leads into the passion part of his story.

Similar to Mark, Matthew and Luke have both taken the Son of Man ball and run with it on their own. Each of them has introduced a few of their own sayings which are not found in the other, though it is possible that some of them may have been included in Q but one of those later evangelists did not use them.¹³⁰

We thus have a picture of the Son of Man motif throughout Q and the Gospels which presents a tangled web of different sources and different applications, with an evolution of their usages and understandings from one stage to the next. If an erroneous assumption is brought to the attempt to unravel this complex situation, confusion and failure will result. That has been the state of the Son of Man question throughout the history of scholarship, with countless books being dedicated to finding a solution to the problem. I suggest that only mythicism is capable of supplying the elusive solution.

At this juncture, we have surveyed the earliest stratum of the Q document and found no Jesus present, nor any sign of the primary focuses of the kingdom community in its preaching activity. Within the basic prophetic and apocalyptic material of Q2 no Jesus was yet found there either. What remains is to identify what evolution parts of the Q2 material eventually underwent, reflecting a stage at which the idea of an historical founder was introduced, with certain amendments made to reflect him. Before doing that, we will take a side-glance at the Gospel of Thomas and see how that document relates to the Q document and what further insight can be gained on what has been concluded thus far.

The Gospel of Thomas and Q

The complete Gospel of Thomas was part of a cache of manuscripts known as the Nag Hammadi Codices which were buried in a jar in Egypt in the 4th century and discovered in 1945. While it is possible that the cache belonged to a gnostic sect, it may also be indicative of a Christian community which had a wider outlook and openness to gnostic doctrine than the orthodox circles which were in the process of weeding out such heretical documents from Christian community libraries. Instead of destroying these texts at the Church's command, it chose to bury them—to our great benefit. The Gospel of Thomas is a collection of 114 sayings attributed to Jesus, said to have been recorded by the apostle Thomas. Like Q, the Gospel of Thomas has no narrative element. Its sayings are listed in no particular order, in a few cases according to a catchword or thematic principle. (One saying containing a certain word or theme was placed following another saying with a similar word or theme.) The document's overall organization is more primitive than Q's, and most of the sayings are preceded by a simple "Jesus said" as in #54:

Jesus said: "Blessed are the poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven."

Or#108:

Jesus said: "He who will drink from my mouth will become like me. I myself shall become he, and the things that are hidden will be revealed to him."

A few of the sayings have a little more elaborate set-up, such as the use of disciples to create a little dialogue with Jesus, as in #18:

The disciples said to Jesus, "Tell us how our end will be." Jesus said: "Have you discovered, then, the beginning, that you look for the end? For where the beginning is, there will the end be. Blessed is he who will take his place in the beginning; he will know the end and will not experience death."¹³¹

As in Q, different types of sayings are found in the Gospel of Thomas. About a third of its content closely parallels many of the sayings of Q1, often with similar wording. They too feature a wisdom-like ethical program based on the anticipation of God's kingdom, or on the view that such a kingdom has already arrived. Other sayings inhabit the same atmosphere but have no parallels in Q. There are a few mild allusions to an apocalyptic outlook, but no Son of Man.

The rest of the sayings in Thomas reflect a very different and more mystical philosophy. They have certain similarities to Gnosticism, though some scholars

balk at calling the Gospel of Thomas "gnostic." As in the second and third examples above, this mysticism relates to the acquiring of secret knowledge and states of being which confer immortality. Nothing of this latter nature is found in Q, or in the New Testament generally. It represents a line of thinking which developed independently of Christian orthodoxy. It may be a reflection of a gnostic-leaning development in the latter 1st century which had contact with the Q preaching movement or developed out of an early phase of it.

Thus we encounter a situation in the Gospel of Thomas much like that in Q, namely that two different types of material lie side by side. It seems probable that the 'mystical' stratum is a later overlay on the Q-like one, and almost no one suggests that its sayings are the genuine product of Jesus. (Those that were judged "authentic" by the Jesus Seminar are from the stratum similar to Q1.) All, however, were eventually attributed equally to Jesus by the Thomas community. The recovered document, in Egyptian Coptic, was made in the 4th century, but is thought to be based on a Greek original that reached its present form some time in the first half of the 2nd century, likely somewhere in Syria.¹³²

Is Any of Thomas Genuine to Jesus?

What of the one-third of Thomas which is clearly related to the material in Matthew and Luke which comes from Q? Debate has centered on a key question. Did the compiler of Thomas—or of its early layer—simply pick and choose some of the sayings from the canonical Gospels, or was this material drawn from earlier, more primitive sources, perhaps oral tradition, thus constituting an independent witness to Jesus and his teachings?

The conclusion of scholars such as Crossan (*Birth of Christianity*, p.116f), Koester (*Trajectories Through Early Christianity*, p.130-32), and Stephen J. Patterson (*The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*), is that no part of Thomas is dependent on the Synoptic Gospels. Koester in *Ancient Christian Gospels* (p.95) is firm: "The materials which the Gospel of Thomas and Q share must belong to a very early stage of the transmission of Jesus' sayings....Thus, the Gospel of Thomas is either dependent upon the earliest version of Q or, more likely, shares with the author of Q one or several very early collections of Jesus' sayings."

In other words, the relationship would seem to be a *literary* one. The close similarity of content and wording between Q1 and the early layer of Thomas would have been difficult to achieve if separately derived from oral materials. The likely alternative is that it must have occurred because Thomas borrowed (a) from a primitive Q (not likely vice-versa), or (b) from a source document on which Q1 was also based. The latter option suggests to scholars that behind Q1 and the parallel early Thomas lay a single collection of sayings which was not dependent on any known Gospel; they tend to date such a collection, and with it the initial formulation of Q and Thomas, very early, perhaps to the 50s of the 1st century. However, my own preference, as will be seen, is for the former option.

Crossan is one who has opted for the source material being oral. He reasons that if both Q and Thomas were drawing from a written source, there should be

some sign of a common order or parallel sequence in the material found in both. But considering that both Q and Thomas underwent stages of enlargement and presumed revision, that lack of common order should not make a written source infeasible. Moreover, we have Q only second-hand, in a compound extraction from Matthew and Luke. While Luke is generally judged to have performed a less obvious reorganization of Q than Matthew, can we presume that Luke himself has not significantly disturbed Q's order in incorporating its pieces into his own Gospel? It would be rather odd to assume that Q's order would just happen to fit conveniently into the needs of Luke's own plotline based on Mark. Further, considering that Thomas, as a multi-layered sayings collection lacking any narrative structure, possesses a virtually non-existent organization, it is not unreasonable to see Q, also a multi-layered sayings collection lacking narrative structure, as being no different before it was used by Matthew and Luke.

But has the unproven, and even unexamined, assumption that this root material in both constituted an early collection of the sayings of Jesus prevented other analyses from being considered? We need to lay out a few comparisons between the content of Q and that of Thomas.

1. Q 6:21 - Blessed are you poor; for yours is the Kingdom of God.

Thomas 54 - Jesus said: Blessed are the poor, for yours is the Kingdom of Heaven.

2. Q 12:2 - Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, nothing hidden that will not be made known.

Thomas 5 - For there is nothing hidden that will not be made known.

3. Q 6:41-2 - Why do you see the speck in your brother's eye, but not notice the beam in your own eye?...First take the beam out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye.

Thomas 26 - Jesus said: You see the mote in your brother's eye, but you do not see the beam in your own eye. When you cast the beam out of your own eye, then you will see clearly to cast the mote out of your brother's eye.

4. Q 14:26-27 - If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, even his own life, he cannot be a disciple of mine. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be a disciple of mine.

Thomas 55 - Whoever does not hate his father and mother cannot become a disciple to me. And whoever does not hate his brothers and sisters and take up his own cross in my way will not be worthy of me.

5. Q 12:39-40 - If the householder had known what hour the thief was coming, he would have been awake and would not have left his house to be broken into; you must also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Thomas 21 - If the owner of a house knows that the thief is coming, he will begin his vigil before he comes and will not let him dig into his house to carry away his goods. You, then, be on your guard against the world.

6. Q 12:10 - Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. Thomas 44 - Jesus said: Whoever blasphemes against the Father will be forgiven, and whoever blasphemes against the Son will be forgiven; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven either on earth or in heaven.

The bulk of their common sayings (28% of Thomas, 37% of Q, according to Crossan's calculation) fall into the Q1-type category of "sapiential" (wisdom) sayings, such as the first three above; they encompass ethics, proverbs and the reversal of fortune motif, and there are several parables. The fourth above relates to discipleship in demanding separation from past ties. But there are also a few sayings in Thomas which lean toward the Q2-type prophetic and apocalyptic variety, yet are much watered down. The last two above appear in Q as part of the later apocalyptic layer (Q2) involving prophetic warnings about the coming Son of Man. But in Thomas that context is missing, and references to something other than the Son of Man stand in their place.

One problem with postulating an earlier source document or oral material for both Thomas and the earliest stage of Q—option (b) above—is the presence of that small latter group in Thomas. Since Q2 is regarded as being added to Q1 only at a later stage, a postulated source document should not have contained any prophetic-type sayings. (And if it were Cynic-derived, it would not have done so.) This would leave Thomas' few of that type out in the cold, without an obvious derivation. (Postulating that these few were actually early sayings, perhaps even authentic to Jesus, and were included in the earliest stratum of Thomas whereas not in Q, runs up against the problem discussed in the last chapter: why would Q *not* have included them in its earliest collection, especially being a community with prophetic and apocalyptic interests?)

There could be two different solutions to this puzzle. One has been rather elaborately proposed by Crossan in his *The Birth of Christianity* (from Chapter 14 on). He speaks of a "Common Sayings Tradition" (CST) within Q and the Gospel of Thomas which contained this mix of sayings—but with no developed apocalypticism to them. Thomas would more or less have preserved this non-apocalyptic character in sayings like the above-mentioned last two, sometimes edging them toward its own proto-gnostic leanings; whereas Q would have developed them in a definite apocalyptic direction, using them to apply to its Son of Man. The problem here, however, is that it is difficult to understand what purpose some of those latter sayings would have served in a non-apocalyptic atmosphere, in a pre-Q and pre-Thomas setting such as Crossan envisions. They almost seem to be simply waiting for both of those documents to make handy use of them in going off in their own respective directions. Moreover, if both initial Thomas and initial Q were drawing on such a CST, why did Q1 not include those 'not-yet-apocalyptic' sayings?¹³³

As Crossan points out, both Q and the Gospel of Thomas are facets of a widespread movement of the day that arose to preach the kingdom of God. He

may be correct in seeing both arising out of a John the Baptist figure who was himself an apocalyptic preacher, calling for repentance in the face of God's imminent intervention on earth, one that would be anything but pleasant. But while one can see the Q community developing from that precedent, eventually adding the Son of Man to John's apocalyptic prophesying (as witnessed in the Q document itself), Crossan in introducing an 'anti-apocalypticism' phase between the two has interrupted that natural sequence. Thomas, too, has no need of such a phase, since it could be seen as at some point simply departing from its Baptist and kingdom preaching roots in order to go its own way, under some proto-gnostic influence; it was led to substitute for an apocalyptic kingdom to come the idea that the kingdom was internal and had already arrived.

In adhering to Kloppenborg's literary sequence, that Q1 was formulated first and Q2 added only later, there has been a need to account for a distinct source of the sayings of Q1. This was best seen as one rooted in the Cynic movement. The prophetic and apocalyptic sayings of Q2, with a different, more Jewish character representing the sect's preaching of the kingdom, were a subsequently produced body of material. But we cannot suggest the same pattern in regard to the CST of Thomas. It is not cogent to see Thomas first taking the wisdom material from whatever prior source also fed into Q1, and then only subsequently producing or drawing on another source for that group of prophetic-leaning sayings. Such a product or source, whether Q2 or some other, should by that time have held no interest for the Thomas community (or rather, the group that would *become* the 2nd century "Thomas community"), since we can assume it would no longer be prophetically oriented. It was moving in a more gnostic direction.

What seems to be more inviting is the second solution. The source Thomas used had to be a single one, with a combination of the two types of sayings, predominantly the wisdom/Cynic type. But if we postulate such a source prior to both Q1 and Thomas, we lose the Kloppenborg compositional sequence, and there are internal markings in Q to justify advocating that sequence: namely, many Q2 elements have been inserted in such a way as to explain or qualify Q1 elements (more on that later). And once again we would have to ask why earliest Q included only the wisdom sayings. What is suggested, then, is that the Thomas combination may be based on an early stage of Q—but later than the initial 'pure' Q1—a stage in which some Q2 elements (including John the Baptist, as in #46) have already begun to be mixed into the developing document.

In that case, when the 'Thomas' group, enticed in a gnostic direction, moved away from the prophetic-oriented mainstream of the kingdom movement, it took along some of those early Q2 sayings, but watered them down in a direction it found more amenable and useful. For example, the saying (#44 quoted above) about the alert householder who, had he been forewarned, would have taken precautions against the thief, was used in Q as an analogy to being alert for the coming of the Son of Man; but we could see it being converted by the Thomas community into an example of how one should be on guard against the world, now seen as an impediment to becoming part of the new "kingdom within you."

In this light, we no longer have two independent witnesses to a source behind Q1 (whether Cynic or otherwise), much less to the sayings of an authentic Jesus. And in fact, we have two witnesses to the *lack* of any such figure. Whether the CST in Thomas was dependent on an early state of the Q document or tradition, or whether we were to regard Thomas as reflecting a pre-Q collection of sayings, we have yet another strain of the kingdom sect which has failed to give us any identifiable traditions that are associated with a founder Jesus. Not only has the Thomas community adopted a sayings collection that lacks such an association, it has failed to contribute any features from its *own* traditions which show such an association. Thus we have what ought to be seen as a highly unlikely state of affairs: two early groups in the kingdom movement (and we will later add the Didache to the list) are silent on any traditions attached to its sayings which preserved aspects of the personality, biography, or ministry of the man who was supposedly their originator.

Crossan (*op.cit.*, p.255) makes this statement, quoting Stephen Patterson:

"In Q and *Thomas* we have the remnants of an early Christian tradition in which emphasis was placed on Jesus' words; this tradition is thus in the broadest sense sapiential."

But neither one asks the telling question we have asked before: Why should early Christianity consistently, over multiple communities, have preserved only an "emphasis" on Jesus' words, but no contexts for those innovative and invaluable words, nothing about him as the charismatic preacher who produced them, nothing about the circumstances of his ministry—not to mention nothing about any death and resurrection, upon which the Gospel of Thomas is as silent as is Q (and the Didache)? We can compare this to the silence in regard to all those 'echoes' of Jesus' Gospel sayings which fail to be attributed to him or to which no biographical elements are ever attached, as found in many of the New Testament epistle writers, such as Paul and James; or as in Hebrews, which can only give us Old Testament passages as the "voice" of the Son in this final age.

"Jesus Said"

It might be countered: what about those "Jesus said" introductions to many of the sayings in Thomas? What about the occasional lead-in citing a question by an apostle or by Mary (Magdalene)? First, our text of Thomas comes centuries after the autograph. There is no evidence available that they were present in earlier stages. They would be natural as secondary additions, perhaps in the 2nd century when the Gospel as we know it was formed, with its later stratum of gnostic-oriented sayings included and the presence of Thomas the disciple as the transmitter. Consider the more extended introductions to some sayings, such as:

Mary said to Jesus: "Whom are your disciples like?"

A woman from the crowd said to him:

Simon Peter said to them: "Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of [eternal] life."

These have never been regarded as anything but secondary additions. On what basis, then, should authenticity be bestowed on the "Jesus said" lead-ins? No doubt the entire lot was added at a time when the Gospels were beginning to have an effect on Christian views of the past, and all and sundry were being attributed to Jesus of Nazareth and the panoply of legendary and invented characters Mark attached to him. Even Q, in any layer, shows no sign of any "Jesus said" introductions.¹³⁴

The early layer of Thomas, as noted, contains no mention of Jesus' death and resurrection, or of a theology of salvation based upon him. Its later mystical layer also has no reference to a death and resurrection, and thus no salvation by means of such events. There is a form of salvation in that following and understanding Jesus' teachings will lead to immortality (#1: one "shall not taste death") but this is not founded on any actions of Jesus. Even in the absence of a Jesus as their originator, such teachings would confer the same benefit.

Thus we find two different kingdom communities adopting and founding themselves on a tradition of teaching which is silent about the entire Jerusalem Tradition of Jesus' death and resurrection. Both evolve along their respective paths without integrating any such thing into their ongoing development.

When did the Thomas Community Form?

When the 'wisdom' sayings of Q1 and the Gospel of Thomas are compared, those in Thomas are usually found to be in a more primitive form. This need not indicate that the Thomas community is older or that it could not have based its sayings on an early Q document, since Q's versions of the sayings may well have undergone 'improvement' in their subsequent history while Thomas more closely preserved the original forms. Thus a Thomas community could have begun during roughly the same time as the Q one, in the mid-1st century, or not long afterward while the kingdom movement was still functioning.

When did it assume the character presented by the extant document? That is more difficult to determine. The mystical/gnostic sayings are hardly of a mature gnostic nature, and while they are generally accepted as a later development over the Q-type wisdom sayings, they could conceivably have been added, reflecting the turn of the community in a proto-gnostic direction, within the late 1st century.

However, the association with an apostle by the name of Thomas cannot be supported at that early a time. It is only during the 2nd century that we find signs of Christian communities in Syria tracing a foundational link back to such a figure. Thus the attribution of the entire document to "Thomas," as embodied in the Gospel's opening: "These are the secret sayings which the living Jesus spoke and which Didymos Judas Thomas wrote down," is almost certainly one of the last things added. It may have come not long after the attribution of the sayings to an historical Jesus, if not at the same time. This elevation of Thomas in importance over other apostles like Peter and Matthew must come from a time when communities were in competition with each other as to who had the most authoritative pipeline back to Jesus. In other words, when the idea of apostolic

tradition, a chain going back through certain apostles and their appointees to the Master himself, was in full swing. For such a state of affairs there is no evidence before the 2nd century; 1st century documents like the Johannine epistles and the Didache, even the letters of Ignatius in the early 2nd century, are lacking such a feature. Since it is also likely that the concern for tracing traditions back to Jesus through an apostle is something that arose almost in conjunction with the development of an historical Jesus, we can thus locate the addition of the "Jesus said" layer of attribution to the period of the Thomas attribution, namely in the first half of the 2nd century, and probably more toward the middle of it.

Other elements of Thomas indicate that a 2nd century redaction produced the version we see now. In saying #21, Mary asks Jesus a question. Her presence among the disciples, here and in the final saying #114, is a feature of several 2nd century Gnostic "dialogue" gospels. Saying #12, which has Jesus designating James the Just as the one who is to take over the leadership of the Christian community when he is gone, also indicates later thinking, for all the traditions which show an interest in tracing authority back to James appear to originate no earlier than some time into the 2nd century. The James witnessed by Paul in Galatians, the apparent head of a group of apostles in Jerusalem, seems to be involved in no missionary activity beyond his own home base, and in the earliest record no community outside Judea traces its origin and authority back to him.

Light from Thomas on Q

It is not my intention to attempt a comprehensive solution to the relationship between the Gospel of Thomas and Q, but to establish a likely basis on which to allow certain of its elements to cast light on the evolution of Q. An important one can be considered here. We have noted that a couple of sayings in Thomas which seem to lean toward the apocalyptic are lacking a reference to the Son of Man which is present in their Q counterparts. I suggested that the Thomas community, in moving away from an apocalyptic atmosphere, may have watered them down and eliminated the Son of Man from their understanding. But Kloppenborg reports (*Formation of Q*, p. 130) on an interesting observation by Schurmann, "that *all* of the Son of Man sayings in Q are attached either to the preceding or following sayings and function to explain or interpret them." For example,

(This wicked generation) asks for a sign, yet no sign shall be given to it but the sign of the Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so shall the Son of Man be to this generation. [Lk./Q 11:29-30]

The second sentence does have the look of a later addition. The speaker has already said that the sign that will be given is "the sign of Jonah." The addition of the Son of Man may be a clarification, but it is only necessary in a subsequent context of equating the two. If Schumann's claim is correct (and Kloppenborg gives some support to it), this would mean that references to the Son of Man, whether prophetic or generic, do not go back to Jesus, or to the earliest period of the community. The concept has been imposed on the document, including on the earliest portion of the Q2 stratum. This would indicate that the sect did not

have a Son of Man figure in its earliest thinking, but only developed him as time went on. Thus, certain Thomas sayings which I suggested were watered down could instead reflect earlier forms before a Son of Man was added to them.¹³¹

What *that* would mean is, one: the idea would not have come from a Jesus but from a source which could only have been scriptural or an 'in the air' idea that was itself ultimately from scripture; two, that it could not have been derived from a generic use of the term by Jesus himself, since even the latter sayings are shown by Schurmann to be secondary. Given these two conclusions, making the Son of Man concept in all its applications a later development, we must virtually rule out that the concept arose out of an interpretation of an historical figure (which is the way scholars opt to see it, at least in regard to the *apocalyptic* Son of Man). If this "Son of Man" had already been on earth in the past, he would not have been portrayed as an entirely future figure, creating the anomaly of having the Q Jesus sound as though he is speaking of someone else who is yet to come. This new Son of Man concept (even if inspired by scripture) would from his first introduction have been integrated into the past earthly founder and portrayed accordingly. Since he has not been, the conclusion must be that the apocalyptic Son of Man arrived on the Q scene before Jesus the founder did.

In fact, Kloppenborg's discussion surrounding the "sign of Jonah" passage further indicates the absence of any currently teaching Jesus or Son of Man figure at this stage of Q. After the declaration that the sign for this generation is the (coming) Son of Man, Q 11:31-32 goes on to compare past wisdom and preaching (in the persons of Solomon and Jonah) with the present: "What is here is greater (*pleion*) than Solomon/Jonah." "*Pleion*" is neuter, which would be incongruous if this were a reference to Jesus in direct comparison with earlier persons. Kloppenborg interprets this (p. 133) as

pronounc[ing] judgment upon those who refuse to respond to some *present reality* which is greater than Jonah or Solomon. Given the context, this can only be the preaching of judgment.

While Kloppenborg attempts to slant this neuter expression toward the personal activities of Jesus, we nevertheless have a statement which eminently fits an original context in which the reference is neither to a Jesus nor to the Son of Man but to the Q preachers in general: Something greater than Solomon and Jonah is here—our message to this generation!

Such a window onto often minute details of Q's literary evolution has been opened in other studies as well. Breakdowns by scholars of many individual passages show that the Q document was frequently amended and doctored to reflect developing understandings, the need for change and clarification and the introduction of new ideas. This suggests that interpreting Q as having been constructed in three large and distinct strata is probably too simplistic; regular smaller changes and insertions were no doubt being made along the way, as this or that editor perceived the need for individual amendments (as discerned in the apparent sub-strata within Q2, for example.) If we were to see the Son of Man as one of these later developments—under the influence of ongoing scriptural

study—this would lend further feasibility to the conclusion we will arrive at in the next chapter: that a founder Jesus was similarly a later development and introduction into the Q text. Finally, the ground-level evolution of Q is mirrored in the subsequent evolution to be seen in the Synoptic Gospels, as successive evangelists honed, amended, reinterpreted what had come before, not only in regard to Jesus but subordinate characters and situations. And we can extend that process to the assumption that such amendment and evolution (even at the allegorical stage) was also going on within each Gospel itself between the time of its original composition and the emergence of the canonical versions in the late 2nd century and the even later witness of extant manuscripts. The Gospel development of the figure of Jesus of Nazareth is simply a subsequent stage to the earlier one in Q, in which we can see his initial emergence into the imagination of the Q community.

To return to our perspective on Thomas and Q, the existence and nature of the Gospel of Thomas confers additional legitimacy on the existence and nature of Q. We have in Thomas a close mirror of the type of content accorded to the hypothetical Q document. Taken together with other ancient wisdom collections, such as examples in Jewish writings (like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes) and in the wisdom literature of Egypt (on which the Jewish examples can be seen to have been modeled), Q gains traction as an entirely feasible entity. Its own evolution into something more than a wisdom/prophetic collection witnesses to the ability of any particular creation to expand outside its starting parameters, an expansion which led to the further evolved product of the Gospels.

As a concluding word—for now—on the existence of Q, we might say that if Q were rejected, we would lose coherence in the development of the Synoptic tradition. We would have no root. There would be no reason or record for the common setting, activities, the spirit and atmosphere of three separate (though not independent) pieces of writing. The Q document or Q traditions feed into all three of Mark, Matthew and Luke. If Q is removed, their core is left empty. We would be thrown back onto the traditional idea that the evangelists were creating an account based on oral traditions going back to Jesus himself, or to the early movement which attributed things to him. But that is no longer adequate, for we can now recognize that there is no sign of such oral traditions in the non-Gospel record, and that the evangelists used midrash on Old Testament themes to create their story, changing anything they wished with no concern for any thought of actual historical tradition. If Q is denied, we lose the Q community as reflected in the Synoptics, and then we do not even have a raw material of ideas in the form of sayings and activities of a real-life situation, for there would be no repository for anything preceding Mark. Virtually everything would have to be the invention of the evangelists or a culling by them of chaotically disparate elements from a diffuse outside world. We would have a group of writers doing nothing but simply creating and redacting texts.

And in that case we would have to ask why.

Part Eight

AN EMERGING FOUNDER

25

Introducing Jesus to Q

Wisdom Collections

In the early stratum of the Q document it is difficult to detect any clear sign of an individual, much less a Jesus of Nazareth, associated with the Q1 wisdom sayings. Even in the apocalyptic layer of Q2, reference to Jesus is missing in key places. If those early sets of sayings were not yet attributed to a founder Jesus, from what source did the Q community imagine they had come?

Critics of the proposal that the wisdom material in Q1 was ultimately derived from Cynic practice and philosophy and not from an historical Jesus have quoted John Kloppenborg on the genre of wisdom collections. The following statements are taken from his discussion of traditional Egyptian instructional collections, but they could apply to most examples of this genre in the ancient world.

Virtually all instructions are ascribed to named sages, usually of some reputation, and the instruction is almost invariably portrayed as parental teaching....(There is a) consistent ascription of instructions to named sages, and (a) corresponding paucity of collections credited to anonymous collectivities. These facts point to the requirement of the genre for an authoritative guarantor of the sayings. [*The Formation of Q*, p.274-5]

This practice is alleged to demonstrate that the kingdom preaching movement, at its inception, would not have been likely to adopt and endorse a body of instructional ethics which was unattributed to anyone. But this presumes that the initial source of the Q1 material or the adaptation of it which the community applied to itself did in fact lack any ascription. This, however, is something which cannot be determined. We do not know the state in which it entered the Q consciousness. It may have been attributed to someone at its source (whether a Cynic or otherwise), or it may have assumed some sort of ascription upon adoption. If it was later attributed to a newly-developed founder, previous ascriptions would have been lost.

Comparison is made to precedents in Jewish literature such as Proverbs, which in its finished form was attributed to Solomon, although parts of the text

feature the prominent voice of Jewish personified Wisdom. But scholarship cannot say exactly who Proverbs—or rather its various components—were attributed to in previous, formative stages, or whether there might have been a period of attribution of the finished product to Wisdom herself before the one to Solomon took shape.

Carole Fontaine (*Harper's Bible Commentary*, p.495) says this of Proverbs:

The book of Proverbs...comprises collections dating from various periods in the history of ancient Israel...[it] probably received its final editing in early postexilic times...'wisdom literature' exudes something of a cosmopolitan air, which reflects its origin in a wisdom tradition common to the ancient Near East. The literary genres found in Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes and the content they convey have parallels in Mesopotamian and Egyptian literature. Moreover it is clear that in a number of instances such extrabiblical literature has had a direct impact on the Israelite traditions. For example, Proverbs 22:17-24:22 reflects a classic Egyptian wisdom text, *The Instruction of Amenemope*, and the 'problem literature' of Mesopotamia bears a striking resemblance to the tone and form of Job. Nevertheless, the Israelite sages subsumed the teachings of their neighbors into a fully Israelite perspective, one integrated with the teachings of the Torah and Prophets.

These remarks demonstrate that the process of integration and attribution tends to take a length of time. There is nothing preventing such a process from having been part of the evolution of Q and its early wisdom material, no evidence that requires us to preclude a stage at which the sayings became imputed to personified Wisdom, or that the Q1 material did not enjoy an initial or previous stage in which it was associated with some foreign originator. Moreover, the development of Proverbs and other early Hebrew documents, as outlined by Fontaine, reveals a history of foreign literary impact on Jewish circles, a borrowing from non-Jewish sources and making them their own, integrating them into more immediate traditions and teachings. This is precisely the situation advocated in the genesis of Q, including the identification of the Q1 ethos as non-Jewish, specifically Cynic.

If this foreign material appealed to the Q community, or was a factor prompting its formation, there may have been no "renowned sage" available to whom it could be assigned in the absence of a singular historical founder. It could hardly have been attributed to Solomon; or to a figure like Hillel, given the lack of rabbinic and traditionally Jewish character to the sayings and its close relevance to a contemporary situation. In any case, the sectarian spirit of the community could soon have led it to be looked upon as possessing a more sanctified—and Jewish—origin, at least in its inspiration.

Wisdom Working in the World

Has Luke left us a clue to that new concept of origin? We earlier looked at Luke/Q 11:49: "That is why the Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and messengers..." Matthew renders the entire saying as the product of Jesus: "I

send you prophets, sages and teachers..." Scholars judge the Lukan version to reflect the Q original, for there seems no reason why Luke would have identified the Wisdom of God as the source of the saying if Q had not already done so.

Could Wisdom herself have come to be regarded as the source of the community's pronouncements? Instead of "Jesus said" perhaps it was "Wisdom said." Wisdom was the personified, communicating aspect of God, an entity who played an important part in Jewish thinking about God's relations with the world. She called people to knowledge of the Deity, his wishes and intentions. The Q preachers may well have regarded themselves as her spokespersons, her envoys. Q 7:35 says: "Wisdom is vindicated by all her children." These and other sayings to be noted show that Wisdom was present in the Q mind, and as a sentient, speaking figure.

Proverbs and other Jewish writings of the time often present statements as the words of Wisdom herself. Perhaps when the initial collection of Cynic-like sayings was adopted by the new movement preaching the kingdom, they were presented as the voice of Wisdom. Q 11:49 gives us evidence of that very thing, and other wisdom oracles are found in Jesus' mouth. In discussing 11:49-51 in the context of other references to Wisdom (Sophia) "sending a series of envoys to Israel with a message of repentance and judgment," Kloppenborg says:

[T]his arises with the fusion of the *well-known sapiential motif of Sophia as a preacher of repentance* (Prov 1:20-33, 8:1-21) and as *indwelling the prophets* (Wis 7:27)... [emphases mine; *The Formation of Q*, p. 112]

In other words, there existed a view of personified Wisdom as a *preacher*, a deliverer of advice and wisdom teachings, and that she was a force that indwelt prophets. This is a perfect fit to the contention that in the early stages of Q development, before an historical Jesus was introduced, Wisdom could have been regarded as the source of the sayings (once the Cynic derivation was lost or discarded). To her also, for a time, could the prophetic sayings of Q2 have been attached. How else would the Q preachers have regarded themselves than as "prophets," and as Kloppenborg notes, prophets were traditionally seen as being 'indwelt' by the Wisdom of God; 7:35, when detached from the artificial pericope it concludes, more than intimates that they regarded themselves as her "children." Kloppenborg himself characterizes them as "envoys of Sophia" [*op. cit.*, p. 123]. There would have been nothing untoward in the Q prophets claiming that their teachings were God's Wisdom speaking through themselves.

Kloppenborg gives us further insight which leads directly to this possibility. In discussing sayings collections in general [p.278], he says (emphases mine):

We have argued above that the tendency of the instruction genre to ascribe the sayings points to the need of the genre for legitimation. Nowhere is this clearer than in Proverbs 1-9. The prologue concludes with a "wisdom speech" (1:20-33) which in effect identifies the voice of the parent-teacher with *that of the divine Sophia crying aloud in the street, admonishing the "simple" to receive instruction*. The entire instruction is thus given not only

the legitimacy which accrues to it from its ascription to the legendary sage-king [Solomon] of Israel's past, but *more importantly, a transcendental authorization from the very source of wisdom itself* The strategy of the prologue of Sirach [Ecclesiasticus] is remarkably similar:....*to link the body of the instructions with Lady Wisdom, who as God's gift to humankind is the source of all human sagacity.*

Thus, for early Q preachers to have attributed their evolving document to Wisdom would be fully in keeping with this traditional interest in gaining "transcendental" authority for such a body of instructions by ascribing it to Wisdom herself. Neither Kloppenborg nor Fontaine would specify that, in the case of Proverbs, the ascription to Solomon is as old as its clear ties to Wisdom, or rule out that Solomon came to be associated with the book only at a later stage. And consider the case of Sirach. The author, one Jesus ben Sira, was in fact *not* a "renowned sage." He was the actual author, an obscure figure who wrote this book around 180 BCE. Apparently, a sayings collection could exist and be passed on *without* an ascription to someone famous or legendary. Such a situation may have obtained with the earliest version of Q1: derived from and initially ascribed to an obscure figure who was its compiler in the pre-Q state. Such a 'source' may have been considered insufficient and no longer relevant, and without an actual "renowned sage" to transfer it to, the ascription in the Q community may have been given to Wisdom. Wisdom may even have come to be seen as the spiritual 'founder' of the movement.

And yet, soon even that was not enough. We can acknowledge the principle of "instructional" attribution. Wisdom collections do tend to be attached to human sages, and the presence of such a collection within the community would be one factor that would have created the impulse to develop an historical founder, one to whom the miracles and controversy traditions of the Q preachers could also be attributed. The benefits of such a founder, not only as a teacher but as the originator of the sect's practices, are well-known in scholarly analysis of the behavior of sectarian groups (see next chapter). If one is not available, the sect usually makes him up.

That little chink left open by Luke may reveal the entire early landscape of Q, a landscape empty of any Jesus figure at all, peopled by a preaching movement inspired from heaven and working under Wisdom's direction. As she had done throughout Israel's prophetic past, Wisdom—so Luke reveals in 11:49—has now sent this culminating wave of messengers to proclaim God's salvation. As in the past, they have received hostility and rejection.

If Wisdom stood as the figurehead of the preaching community for its first few decades, when did a founder Jesus enter the picture? For there does seem to have been a handful of passages in Q which contained him, where he is part of a common contextual element in Matthew and Luke: the Temptation story, the healing of the centurion's servant at Capernaum, the Dialogue between Jesus and John, the Beelzebul controversy which involved a healing exorcism. Most Q scholars, from John Kloppenborg on, regard the Temptation story as the very

latest addition to Q. Here Jesus seems to be pushed in the direction of divinity—depending on how we interpret the phrase "Son of God." The more advanced character of this episode establishes the principle of a Q3 stratum, one focused specifically on a founder Jesus with a degree of substance and personality. I will make use of such a stratum to delineate the arrival of a perceived historical figure in the thinking of the Q community, one who took the place of Wisdom as the instigator of the movement and the originator of the sayings.

preempting Wisdom

The most significant passage which marks the arrival of a Jesus in Q is the extended pericope known as the Dialogue between Jesus and John: Luke/Q 7:18-35 (excising verses 29-30 which are a Lukan insertion). We need to reproduce the entire passage here:

¹⁸John too was informed of all this by his disciples. Summoning two of their number ¹⁹he sent them to the Lord with this message: "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to expect some other?" ²⁰The messengers made their way to Jesus and said, "John the Baptist has sent us to you: he asks, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to expect some other?'" ²¹There and then he cured many sufferers from diseases, plagues, and evil spirits; and on many blind people he bestowed sight. ²²Then he gave them his answer: "Go," he said, "and tell John what you have seen and heard: how the blind recover their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are clean, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, the poor are hearing the good news. ²³And happy is the man who does not find me a stumbling-block."

²⁴After John's messengers had left, Jesus began to speak about him to the crowds: "What was the spectacle that drew you to the wilderness? A reed-bed swept by the wind? ²⁵No? Then what did you go out to see? A man dressed in silks and satins? Surely you must look in palaces for grand clothes and luxury. ²⁶But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes indeed, and far more than a prophet. ²⁷He is the man of whom Scripture says,

'Here is my herald, whom I send on ahead of you,
And he will prepare your way before you.'

²⁸I tell you, there is not a mother's son greater than John, and yet the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.

[...]

³¹HOW can I describe the people of this generation? What are they like? ³²They are like children sitting in the market-place and shouting at each other, 'We piped for you and you would not dance.
We wept and wailed, and you would not mourn.'

³³For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He is possessed.' ³⁴The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look at him! a glutton and a drinker, a friend of tax-gatherers and sinners!' ³⁵And yet God's wisdom is proved right by all who are her children." [NEB]

John Kloppenborg readily acknowledges the composite nature of this unit:

It is more than likely that the entire pronouncement story (7:18-23) is a post-Easter creation...The next pericope (7:24-28) is clearly composite...The second commentary word [7:28] is an originally independent Kingdom saying...known in another form in *Gos. Thorn.* 46. [*op.cit.*, p. 107-9]

Similarly, 7:31-35 is presented as loaded with composite features, including verse 35 which "may in fact be an originally independent saying" (p. 112). Kloppenborg is appealing to several independent sayings (two can be located in Thomas) as strong indicators that the entire complex is an artificial construction. Such a scene never happened, nor is it likely that anything like it existed in the tradition. Its features suggest that it was put together in later Q to serve a couple of purposes: to marginalize John (and perhaps his following) and render him subordinate to Jesus, and to declare Jesus to have been the Coming One.

The latter stands in contradiction to the opening pericope of John's preaching and prophecy. There (3:17) John warns of the coming apocalyptic judge—in Q's eyes, the Son of Man—who has clearly not yet been to earth. It is hardly likely that at a later point in a unified story or tradition this same John would ask of a man who is in fact on earth if he is the Coming One. In the Dialogue, John is 'answered' by Jesus' performance of miracles—on the spot of some handy blind, sick and lame, a lame device seemingly of Luke's invention; Matthew simply has Jesus refer to past miracles. Yet there had been no thought of the Coming One being due to perform miracles in the earlier Baptist prophecy, thereby making him now recognizable by John. The contradictions between the two passages are too great to think that the Dialogue is anything other than a clumsy editorial construction serving the immediate purpose of clarifying John's relationship to Jesus when the latter was introduced to Q. Had a Q Jesus been on the scene from the beginning, the opening Baptist passage would have reflected that situation. Since it does not, the Dialogue is clearly something created at a later time; there is no tradition history behind it.

Kloppenborg is himself aware of this glaring discrepancy. It was noted earlier that he interprets the opening pericope as the Baptist foretelling the arrival of "God himself or some supra-human (angelic?) figure." Yet the Jesus queried by John is a miracle-working herald of the kingdom. The "*erchomenos*" of the opening prophecy and the "*erchomenos*" of the Baptist's query in the Dialogue were understood as two different figures because the passages were formulated at different times with different concepts behind them (the coming judge and the past founder), with no steps taken to resolve the contradiction. Kloppenborg also points to Q13:34-35, a wisdom oracle prophesying a Coming One who is once again a future figure, accompanied by apocalyptic overtones.

Thus the Dialogue, presenting an historical preacher and miracle worker, stands between bookends referring to an eschatological judge. Kloppenborg calls this a "theological detour." But someone with a first-time arrival in the future cannot take a 'detour' to assume the identity of a past rabbi. This is a whole new ball game, and shows that the first concept preceded the second. The Jesus of the

Dialogue is a late arrival who has already missed the first game of a double-header in which it was only the Son of Man at bat. The incongruity was allowed to stand (if it was even noticed) because it represented an evolved concept in the Q mind and the later understanding was read into past expressions without sufficient perspicacity. But the incongruity itself could not have developed if throughout Q's history all these references to a Coming One related to the same figure, an historical founder who had been there from the beginning.

Another element in this artificial scene indicates a recasting of the past. The sequence from verse 24 to 28 is a unit in itself which has undergone evolution. Jesus' question to the crowd, "What did you go out into the desert to see?" stands alone in the Gospel of Thomas (#78) where it has no apparent reference to the Baptist and is even more truncated than the corresponding verses in Q:

Jesus said: "Why have you come out into the desert? To see a reed shaken by the wind? And to see a man clothed in fine garments? Upon them are the fine (garments), and they are unable to discern the truth."

If one compares this Thomas saying to verses 24-26 in the Q Dialogue scene quoted above, one sees that the third question about seeing a prophet is missing in Thomas. Scholars are divided as to which version was the original; some have concluded that Thomas pared down the Q version (that is, the *original* Q saying itself before its incorporation into the Dialogue). They suggest that new use was made of it in an abbreviated form—including dropping the Baptist—to score a point about changing one's attitudes toward the rich and powerful (the "reed" is thought to be a reference to Herod who placed such a symbol on his coins) who, unlike the kingdom people, know nothing of truth.

This would leave that original Q saying pointing to the Baptist as someone whom it would be worth going out into the desert to see, since he is not only a prophet, he is more than a prophet. And why was he more than a prophet? In what follows in the Dialogue, verses 27 and 28, there are two different reasons given. Crossan points out (*op.cit.*, p.306-7) that there is a strong scholarly consensus that Q 7:27 is a later addition to the unit. Here, the reason why John is "more than a prophet" is because he is God's messenger, preparing the way for Jesus; he is the fulfillment of scripture in its prophecy that Elijah would return to signal the imminent Day of the Lord. But this strikes one as a bit of a come-down, since the previous verses have built up John as a unique figure and force, only to be suddenly reduced to a mere herald. This reduction in status suggests that verse 27 is not only a separate insertion, it has resulted from the introduction of Jesus onto the scene, requiring a clarification of the relative status between the two, with John being the one to suffer in the comparison.

What follows in verse 28 also has a parallel in Thomas #46:

Jesus said: "Among those born of woman, from Adam until John the Baptist, there is no one so superior to John the Baptist that his eyes should not be lowered (before him). Yet I have said, whichever one of you comes to be a child will be acquainted with the kingdom and will become superior to John."

It can be seen that Q's verse 28 (as does Thomas' #46) provides a different reason for John being more than a prophet. In conjunction with 24-26, leaving aside verse 27, it provides a better connection between the two ideas (as does Thomas). John has been built up as more than a prophet, and further stated as the greatest one born of woman, in order to make the point that, even so, the least member of the kingdom movement is greater than he was. This, too, is a come-down for John, but for a different purpose, one which has nothing to do with heralding Jesus. Rather, while it involves a bow to him as the kingdom's great prophetic precursor, it serves to make a more important bow to those who belong to the kingdom sect, raising their status in their own eyes by placing them as superior even to one who was great and unique in his own way. (The implication of 28 is that John was not regarded as having belonged to the sect, otherwise the least of its members, i.e., lesser than John, could not be greater than he.)

This gives us a free-standing unit imbedded in the Dialogue, one which did not involve Jesus—or need him. It thus becomes likely that 24-26 plus 28 was an independent complex in Q before it became a building block of the Dialogue. At that latter time, verse 27 was inserted to state the new reason for John's greatness as a prophet: his heralding of Jesus; verse 28 was kept for the sake of its own previous purpose, likely with no cognizance of the incongruity thus created.

Such a picture is supported by another incongruity. The greatness comparison originally concerned only John and the kingdom members. But should not Jesus himself have entered into the rivalry for superior status in verse 28? Would a Q saying trouble to exalt the least kingdom member as greater than John when Jesus the founder hovered over them both? The fact that there is no sign of Jesus here indicates that the 'comparison' unit was once free-standing itself, with no awareness of a Jesus to compromise its original purpose. Its contact with Jesus (in verse 27) came only with the creation of the Dialogue. Other component parts which can be seen to make up the Dialogue similarly lack any identifiable presence of the Jesus figure in their previous independent states.

The conclusion of the Dialogue (31-35) is also a composite creation, using an already-existing parable (but not previously in Q). The people of this generation are "like children sitting in the market-place and shouting at each other,

'We piped for you and you would not dance. We wept and wailed, and you would not mourn.'"

This enigmatic parable seems to be describing two parties in some now lost antagonistic clash of outlook and lifestyles. The redactor has used it to embody a contrast between Jesus and John, making the point that "this generation" has rebuffed both the dark, ascetic John and the more libertine Jesus. However, the fit is not perfect. As Kloppenborg points out, verses 33 and 34 present first John and then Jesus, the opposite order to the two elements in the parable. Then one could note that, unlike the terminology of the rest of the Dialogue, the contrast here is said to be between John and the Son of Man. The intrusion of the latter phrase seems out of place, and one wonders if the thought of verses 33 and 34 formed an already existing unit in Q before the redaction of the whole Dialogue

was effected, and if it contained a reference to the Son of Man. If so, such a unit could have been making some sort of contrast between the kingdom *message* being delivered by two different approaches: one by the ascetic John, the other by the more liberal-minded preachers of the Son of Man. In other words, it was a contrast between the Baptist's style and that of the kingdom community itself which followed him. The Dialogue's redactor may have understood and kept the second element—containing the phrase "Son of Man"—as referring to Jesus.

The final verse 35 is almost universally regarded as a previously independent saying brought in to provide a punch line to the whole business. Its implications again embody some incongruities. In the early part of the Dialogue, the object has been to render John subordinate to Jesus. Yet here, they seem to be placed on an equal footing. Both are "children of Wisdom." And the preceding verses have conveyed the idea that both men and their approaches are being presented as of equal status, merely different. Again, the redactor has not managed to create consistency. However, he would in any case have found it difficult to introduce a suggestion of inequality in his use of the phrase, since this would have clashed with the equality inherent in the parable he has adopted.

We should also observe another implication, that whether one is subordinate to the other or not, both are fully human; there is no suggestion that Jesus possesses a divine nature. This, too, is inconsistent with the concept of the "coming one" which John has asked about, since such a figure has to this point been identified with the apocalyptic Son of Man, who is more than human. It has been suggested that the "coming one" refers to the Messiah, who traditionally was to be a human man. But this would clash with the clearly heavenly Son of Man who is of paramount interest in Q; and the term Messiah does not appear in the document, nor the traditional motifs specifically associated with him. Two separate eschatological figures being predicted in Q would create considerable confusion, each due to arrive with his own entourage, setting up a future conflict in their respective apocalyptic activities and a competition for hotel and courtroom space. It is difficult to resolve some of the apparent contradictions in the text when the Q compilers, quite oblivious to it all, have created them at the source. And it demonstrates how difficult it is to derive any history from such a disordered and jerry-built 'record.'

The redactor's inconsistency here might also have been the result of the "children of Wisdom" saying. It may have had an original meaning which did not involve any concern for two figures who bore a superior-inferior relationship to each other. In fact, the words "*all* her children" seem meant to encompass more than just two people. While the saying's original context cannot be known, or whether the Baptist was involved in it, we can postulate that "all her children" referred to or included the preachers of the kingdom movement who regarded themselves as Wisdom's children and messengers. This would reinforce the preceding observations on the presence of the "Son of Man" phrase and lead us to conclude that, once again, we are led toward seeing an earlier phase lurking behind the present text which envisioned no founder Jesus on the scene. It would

also strengthen the proposal that Wisdom was regarded, in that pre-Jesus phase as the divine originator of the sayings and the 'spiritual founder' of the sect who continued to guide its spokespersons as a parent does her children.

At this point, we could pause to make an observation which would put the final touches on the evidence for the existence of Q. The very fact that such analyses as the foregoing can be made about many of the passages assigned to Q is a proof of the integrity of the theory. The structural features, the stratigraphy, the clear indications of evolving interpretation and redaction over time: such things could only arise in the context of a distinct document whose textual history could entail all these things. (We could call it Q's 'moons of Jupiter.') The alternative, that all these passages with their unique features of evolution and redaction were the original creation of Matthew, to be copied by Luke, is not feasible. These processes had to be independent of and precede Matthew.

Altering the Q Texts

As can be seen from the above analysis of the Dialogue, we may postulate that one of the processes in the evolution of the Q sayings was a certain degree of alteration to them so as to reflect the development of new ideas, especially the introduction of a founder Jesus in the thinking of the community.

For example, in the Dialogue itself, the opening paragraph involving John's question, "Are you the coming one?" may have had some previous equivalent in Q, reflecting a question put by outsiders to the Q preachers: "Are these the last times? Can we expect the one who is to come [meaning the Son of Man], or will there be further delay?" Behind verse 22 may lie the community's original response: to quote passages from Isaiah about the poor rejoicing, about the expected signs and wonders that would attend the coming of God's kingdom, the healing of the blind, the deaf, the lame, the dumb. Yes, said the earlier Q, the kingdom was definitely coming, and it pointed to the preaching and healing activities of the Q prophets. In the new version, Jesus points to his own miracles, including the raising of the dead.

Similarly, the two 'miracle' anecdotes (7:1-10 and 11:14-22) could have begun life in the Q tradition as a record of wonder-working by the Q preachers. Some unnamed prophet may have performed a 'healing' on a centurion's servant/son, while the Beelzebul controversy is simply a group of sayings about the *practice* of exorcism and what this says about Satan's power and dominion, sayings which could originally have been the voice of the community itself. The involvement of a Jesus in both of these scenes would then be a secondary redaction. In fact, the Beelzebul set is prefaced by a report of the drawing out of a devil from a dumb man, and here the difference in wording between the two evangelists makes it uncertain whether the name Jesus appeared in the Q original or not. Scholars disagree on the redactive history of 11:14-22 (as they do in so many of Q's units), coming up with widely different combinations of original and appended verses; thus another theoretical proposition, one in keeping with observations on other pericopes in Q, is not in itself an unreasonable recourse.

Thus it is possible to recognize a stage in the later evolution of Q in which a handful of units, such as the Dialogue between Jesus and John and the Beelzebub controversy, were fashioned from older pieces. A healing miracle previously ascribed to some Q prophet was recast as that of Jesus. And the set of three *chreiai* in which Jesus responds to bystanders' remarks would have been fashioned at this time out of discrete sayings from the Q1 stratum. Minor internal changes were also likely made: the insertion of some personal pronouns now that the words were placed in Jesus' mouth, some incidental reworking to reflect his role.¹³⁶ Most of the previous material would have been allowed to stand as before, though its order may have been rearranged. We might even envision the whole document being provided with a heading identifying it as the words of the new Jesus. The latest stage of Thomas indicates just such a process.

A Different Q3

Traditionally, the stratum labeled Q3 has been styled as a movement toward 'biography' and identifying Jesus as a "son of God"—although the significance of that term is far from clear. Kloppenborg has placed only one substantial unit in his Q3. This is the Temptation Story which is positioned early in the Synoptics and apparently early in Q. But to call it biography is surely a misnomer. This unit could never have been composed to represent even an imagined biographical event. Kloppenborg discusses several scholars' evaluations of it (p.250-2), most of them seeing it as instructional allegory. (And if Jesus serves an allegorical and instructional purpose here, he could well be seen as doing the same throughout the whole of Q.) Bultmann argued that it "functioned as a paradigm of obedience suitable for post-baptismal catechesis." In other words, the figure of Jesus, his refusal to give in to temptation, is meant to provide a lesson for the community, a guide for their own response to temptation. (The three temptations have been interpreted in various ways: see chapter 28.) Thus, the story is not history, not biographical, and unrelated to any postulated narrative concerns.¹³⁷

The Temptation Story alone refers to Jesus as "son of God" (in the mouth of Satan). In another Q passage, 10:22, which some scholars place in a Q3, Jesus apparently refers to God as "my father":

"Everything has been entrusted to me by my [or, the] Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

However, there are textual problems with a key word. In the first clause, was it "*my* Father" or simply "*the* Father"? M. Jack Suggs (*Wisdom, Christology and Law in Matthew's Gospel*, p.71f) discusses the variation between "my" and "the" in the manuscripts, suggesting that Luke (and Q) originally showed "the," while Matthew seems to have changed it to "my," prompting later scribal assimilations of Luke to Matthew's version. This would eliminate any thought that the Q Jesus regarded himself as a divine son of God or that Q itself had an interest in rendering its founder divine; whereas, a Q preacher could certainly envision the community, or himself, as possessing knowledge conferred by God.

The saying which follows is universally agreed to be derived from a traditional expression about Wisdom; the redactor has apparently 'modernized' it to "the Son" (unless Matthew and Luke have both altered it). However, in Q there is no particular evidence that the "Son" in this saying was meant to be identified with its Jesus; this would have carried Q's view of its founder to an astronomical level which is nowhere else attested, not even in the Temptation Story. (There, the phrase "son of God" need by no means imply actual Godhood, and the quotation of Deut. 6:16—"You shall not put the Lord your God to the test"—is hardly meant to have the Q Jesus declare himself God.) But if the Son *was* meant to refer to Jesus, the most one might say about Q 10:22 is that Jesus was regarded as the recipient of Wisdom's revelation about God and thus was styled as a representative or personification of her.

It is also significant that this Wisdom=Son oracle is followed in Matthew (11:28-30) by yet another Wisdom pronouncement. This one, in fact, bears a strong resemblance to two passages in the famous Jewish wisdom collection of Jesus son of Sirach. In 51:23-26, the voice of Wisdom herself says:

"Come to me, you who need instruction, and lodge in my house of learning...
Bend your neck to the yoke, be ready to accept discipline..."

And in 24:19f, she says:

"Come to me, you who desire me, and eat your fill of my fruit...
Whoever feeds on me will be hungry for more,
And whoever drinks from me will thirst for more."

Whether Matthew is paraphrasing these sentiments of Sirach or is drawing from another, similar source (and perhaps reworking with certain points of his own), he follows the saying about the Son knowing the Father with this:

"²⁸Come to me, all whose work is hard, whose load is heavy; and I will give you relief. ²⁹Bend your necks to my yoke, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble-hearted; and your souls will find rest. ³⁰For my yoke is good to bear, my load is light."

This conjunction shows that Matthew interpreted the Q saying which precedes it as a Wisdom pronouncement, although he has used it to declare Jesus the Son as the channel to the Father. His extra verses (28-30) are generally judged as not having been in Q, although it is always possible that they were and Luke did not use them, especially as we find a stripped-down version of it in the Gospel of Thomas (#90). In any case, whatever was in Q need not have involved an understanding of its founder figure as possessing actual divinity, let alone that he was to be identified as part of the Godhead. If Q 10:22 was a Wisdom saying, it meant that while Wisdom is the only one who knows the Father, through her the kingdom community possesses a pipeline to him. Through Wisdom is everything entrusted by the Father to the sect, a meaning which once again supports the figure of Wisdom as the source of the sayings and the inspiration for the sect's genesis and continued guidance. It will be seen in the next chapter that

there is much evidence in Q that the figure of Wisdom in these roles evolved into an imagined founder who took over such roles, with Wisdom pronouncements translated into sayings by him. Wisdom was now seen as having spoken through this new founder.

Jesus and the Son of Man

Was the new Jesus identified with the sect's anticipated Son of Man? Does finished Q in fact imply this, or is the point ambiguous? Even in the Gospels, the coming Son of Man sayings in Jesus' mouth still sound as though he is speaking of someone else. Q seems to vacillate. On the one hand, we should be compelled to assume an equation of the two on the basis of the Dialogue. If in that unit John is asking whether his Coming One is present in the person of someone on the scene, and if we assume in view of above arguments that this *erchomenos* cannot be envisioned as a separate figure from the Son of Man, then the Q redactor must at this point be equating Jesus and the Son of Man. They are identifying their new founder as that Son of Man, evidently on earth in a pre-apocalyptic ministry. As suggested earlier, this may have been effected through the influence of the non-prophetic son of man sayings—the 'euphemism for man' ones which were now capable of being interpreted as the words of a teaching prophet on earth (e.g., Lk./Q 9:58 and possibly the triple tradition Mk. 2:10 and 28). These would more easily have been associated with a founder; then, by extension, the apocalyptic Son of Man rode in to be attached to him on their coattails.

On the other hand, anomalies elsewhere suggest otherwise. Kloppenborg points out a problem in Luke/Q 12:8-10 for which he has no solution.

⁸I tell you, everyone who confesses me before men, the Son of Man shall confess him before the angels of God; ⁹but he who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God. ¹⁰And everyone who will speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him.

Kloppenborg points out what should be obvious. Verse 10a stands in "flat contradiction" to verse 9. Rejection of Jesus in the latter is to be punished by rejection at the judgment. Yet verse 10a says that those who reject the Son of Man can be forgiven. If Jesus and the Son of Man are one and the same—and Kloppenborg claims that in Q they are "clearly identified"—this becomes an "enigma." He surveys various scholarly explanations for this anomaly, none of which satisfy him (nor should they), and in the end he simply observes that Q was unable to "integrate verse 10a into its theology," just as neither Luke nor Matthew were able to do.

However, there is a dual way of resolving this conundrum. If the Son of Man and the new founder Jesus were *not* identified with each other, at least at the time 12:8-10 was formed, there is no conflict. At the same time, we ought to see verses 8 and 9 as originally referring to the community itself (another pronoun change), something to the effect that "everyone who accepts our message will be accepted (judged favorably) in heaven by the Son of Man, but those who reject

us and our message will be rejected." Apparently, the Q preachers felt more lenient toward anyone who might "speak a word" against the Son of Man himself, although a word (blasphemy) against the Holy Spirit merited no mercy. Perhaps the redaction which produced the Dialogue came even later, and only by that time was an identification being made between the *erchomenos* Son of Man and the founder figure. Once again, no effort was made to correct any anomalies that were now being created in previous strata.

Even in the latest stratum, references to the coming Son of Man have not been recast to imply a second coming (just as we are lacking such an implication in the coming of Christ forecast in the epistles). If Jesus is the Son of Man in Q, then his arriving at the End-time would be a return, and we would expect—just as we should expect it in the epistles—that at least some of the time the 'return' idea would be expressed. Moreover, none of the apocalyptic Son of Man sayings in Q have identifiable associations with present activity. Even in the comparison with the 'sign of Jonah' as discussed earlier, the reference to the greater (preaching) which is "here" is cast as a neuter thing, not a single person, let alone the Son of Man himself; that neuter "*pleion*" leads one to think (and Kloppenborg has agreed) that it is the preaching activity of the community that is being offered in comparison. The "sign of the Son of Man" is cast as a future event and thus he is not being equated with the founder Jesus.

There are too many of these anomalies throughout the Q2 and Q3 strata to dismiss them as accidental imperfections in editorial expression (to which we can add the anomalies present in Q1). Some situation underlying the progress from one stage to another must be present, bearing the responsibility for creating a slew of incongruities which probably not even the most competent redactor could have avoided. Indeed, full recognition of them would have revealed a little too much to the Q mind. Moreover, these anomalies can be seen as consistent, all of them fitting one scenario: the introduction partway through Q's evolution of a figure who was not there from the beginning.

A few larger questions still remain to be answered. Where did the community's idea of a founder Jesus originate? How did such a figure arise in Q consciousness if he was not based on an actual historical man? Further, why was he given the name Jesus, which in other circles possessed the full significance of its Hebrew meaning: Savior? For there is no soteriology in Q, no theory of salvation by its Jesus. Q does not see its child and representative of Wisdom as a redeeming figure. The Jesus of Q does not undergo a death and resurrection; he does nothing, beyond speak the sayings, to enable salvation. The Jesus figure of Q, whenever he arrived on the scene, could not have given rise to the atonement theology and redemptive sacrifice of full-blown Christianity. Nor could Q have developed out of cultic precedents like that of Paul. Even at the latest stage of Q we still see a clear separation between the Galilean and Jerusalem traditions. Their paths have not yet crossed. That amalgamation will only come with Mark.

But before that, we need to complete the picture of the emergence of Q's founding sage.

Sectarian Developments in Q

Christianity as a Sectarian Phenomenon

One of the most profound and far-reaching insights in the history of New Testament scholarship arrived around 1970.

Previously, the interpretation of Christian origins had largely enjoyed a protected and rose-colored status. The internal workings of the Christian movement, it was claimed, had not been governed by the same forces which invested other religious and social groupings. Christianity was not to be regarded as a product of its time, and more than one scholar made that bold declaration in print. If Paul or Luke issued a dictum on social behavior, if they championed the rituals and practices of the Christian communities, such things had developed within the early Christian movement as a result of theological necessity, revealed through the spirit from God or Jesus' own teachings.

Theological correctness, current wisdom said, was permanent and timeless, isolated from its historical origins and ultimately proceeding from the will of God. Nothing in the personal experiences of the great saintly figures of early Christianity, such as Paul or the evangelists, would have disturbed this inspired pursuit of the truth. The Christian movement had evolved along a path of divine inevitability, uninfluenced by its day to day social and political context.

When that snug little balloon was finally pricked, it collapsed immediately. Almost overnight, scholars began turning out books and articles showing that, in fact, the process had worked the other way around. Christianity had been a thoroughly sectarian expression. Theological principles tended to be developed in order to justify and legitimate community practice. The religious construct which the movement evolved for itself served primarily to fill its needs as a social group. The way such a group viewed and interpreted its past was entirely determined by its life situation in the present.

The study of Christianity as a sect, one which followed universal rules of sectarian behavior, had finally begun.

A sect is by nature a group which has set itself up in opposition to the rest of society. Or it has been forced into that position because its reform agenda, its new interpretation of events and of society's guiding principles, has not been accepted by the wider establishment. In this situation of isolation and conflict, the emerging group has to justify its stance, its new view of the world. The first audience at which that justification is directed has to be itself; only secondly is it aimed at the larger world.

The reaction of a sectarian community follows consistent paths. One path looks backwards. Support for the present is sought by a reconstruction of the past. The legitimacy of current faith and teaching, current ritual and practice, is strengthened if it can be shown that such things were there from the beginning; that they were established under divine auspices, in inspiring circumstances, and preferably by an heroic founder figure with a pipeline to the deity. The more inspiring and glorified that past, the greater will be the faith and determination of the present believers. This is especially needed at a time of conflict, or during a later generation when the fervor and loyalty of the initial period may be flagging. In keeping with the broader tendencies of human societies to seek meaning and stability for the present through myths of a sacred, determining past, the sectarian group seeks to sanctify its beliefs and practices by embodying them in hallowed and unimpeachable precedents.

Another path looks outward, beyond the battlements. A strong self-defense is needed for the sect in order to withstand attacks from a hostile environment. Theology is to a great extent determined by that conflict. Again, the rejection undergone by the sect is sanctified by being seen as the reflection of a similar rejection experienced by the founding members or glorified founder figure. Further strength can be gained by portraying that figure as having forecast the present time of troubles and girding his followers for it.

Finally, all these elements of sectarian response require a document in which to be recorded. The account of the community's formation, the story of its founder, his teachings and his example, the events and roots upon which the sect's theology is based: these things are set down in a 'foundation document.' For the kingdom movement, Q became its foundation document; when that movement was expanded to encompass the cultic sacrificial Christ and create our composite Christianity, the Gospel of Mark was composed to fill that purpose.

Sociologists have shown that such things have been an almost universal phenomenon of sectarian expression throughout history and around the world. New Testament scholars who have addressed this question have shown that early Christianity fits this mold like a glove.¹³⁸

A Founder Figure for the Q Community

We have noted that Q1 does not represent a distinct temporal phase at the start of the Q community itself. But to the extent that it reflects a Cynic-like philosophy and lifestyle, it constitutes a group message whose adherents have dissociated themselves from the regular workings of society. Although there is in this stratum of material no record of violent contention with an establishment, a background conflict of some sort can be inferred from the fact that all counter-cultures inevitably experience friction with the mainstream culture. In Q1, there are allusions to alienation from parents and the need to 'take up one's cross' to follow the group's way of life. We can assume that to the extent that the material in Q1 is derived from some previous application in a Cynic-like group, it was the expression of a sectarian outlook and practice.

On the other hand, there is in this material a notable absence of focus on glorified beginnings or a founder figure. Typical Jewish apocalypticism is lacking. The kingdom of God being proclaimed seems little more than that found in popular Hellenistic philosophy, with some mild Jewish overtones.

But Q2 is a different case. Here we find a reflection of classic sectarianism. Hostility and reaction, a circling of the wagons. The transition from one to the other is abrupt, the gulf wide. It is difficult to believe that an early phase of the sect we see in Q2 could have operated for a time solely within the atmosphere and principles embodied in the Q1 wisdom sayings. Its prophetic and apocalyptic outlook—which is hardly something that would have been abruptly adopted after a period without it—would imply that hostility should have been encountered almost immediately.

Again, the natural conclusion would be that the essence of Q1 represents a foreign source, one which first flourished in a non-Jewish milieu. The Jewish, or Hellenistic-Jewish, preachers of the new movement may have discovered and adopted it, perhaps making minor adaptations during assimilation, soon claiming it as the product of Wisdom. It would not have been the first time Jews had come in contact with foreign writings, or the ideas contained in them, and transformed them into their own product. Thus, both Q1 and Q2 reflect simultaneous aspects of the community's life and thinking, but there would have been a period of time between the adoption of Q1 at the sect's beginnings, and the development and recording of the actual sayings of Q2.

But where is Q2's sectarian focus on the past, or a glorified founder? Here we have an intriguing kind of split. For the Q community, John the Baptist marked the inauguration of the new era of preaching. They had recognized him as a forerunner, if not an actual founder. (Again, had he been viewed as their founder, they would not have declared him to be of lesser stature than the least in the kingdom.) Still, in sectarian fashion, he served to validate present teachings by locating them at the movement's inception. He had prophesied what the Q community was now prophesying, especially the coming of the Son of Man.

But perhaps his role was limited because the Q community had from the beginning possessed a proper and glorious founder, one larger than life, with a true pipeline to the Deity. That founder had been Wisdom herself. With this personified communicating agent of God in place, John the Baptist's role would have been limited. Luke/Q 7:35 implies that he had been relegated to the status of "child of Wisdom," a designation applied to all members of the Q community as preachers of the coming Kingdom.

Egyptian instructional writings were attributed to their god of wisdom, Thoth; the pagan Hermetic writings to the god Hermes. Ancient Mesopotamian legal and ethical compilations were no doubt often ascribed to their own deities. The attribution of a movement's founding ethical principles to the Jewish divine Wisdom would not have been out of the ordinary. Ultimately, however, even Wisdom possessed deficiencies as an ideal founder. If she had not actually been on earth, she could only inspire the community and transmit its teachings from

Heaven. She had not performed the actions which reflected and predetermined those of the community. She had not herself engaged in controversy with the Jewish authorities. Most important, she had not spoken the sect's teachings in the flesh.

Instructional messages are best impressed upon the recipients, and tend to be embodied, in personal stories involving an individual. Such an individual serves better as an exemplar than does an impersonal directive. The same applies to the sayings of Q2 embodied in the miracle and controversy stories. An attribution of such teachings and activities to the community, which originally served to articulate the sect's self-understanding, would inevitably have focused on an historical individual (real or imagined) to better highlight and convey that understanding. In a discussion of the "Projected Audience" for Q, Kloppenborg points out:

While the ostensible or implied audience is 'this generation,' it is, of course, hardly likely that Q was broadcast as a whole to outsiders as missionary propaganda, or circulated as a polemical tract....In their redactional arrangement these sayings articulate the conflict between the Q group and their Jewish contemporaries over the preaching of the kingdom. Conflict with outsiders...actually serves a positive and constructive purpose as a means to define more clearly group boundaries, to enhance internal cohesion and to reinforce group identity. This stratum of Q [Q2] articulates its conflict with 'this generation' in terms which provide a transcendental legitimacy for the community....Thus, while ostensibly directed at the 'out-group,' these polemical and threatening materials function in fact to strengthen the identity of the 'in-group' and to interpret for them the experience of persecution, rejection and even the failure of their preaching of the kingdom. [*The Formation of Q*, p. 167-8]

These observations indicate the forces that would have been at work to develop a founder, since such a figure always serves to advance the sect's needs and purposes. The fact that such a founder is nowhere in evidence in Q1, even given the benefits that the presence of such a figure would have produced, tends to show that he is not there because no such figure was available, not that the community only had an interest in his words and not his person. The latter idea, which so many scholars offer by default, runs contrary to all sectarian behavior. Wisdom seems to have served as a stop-gap until the need for an historical founder became so insistent that he materialized in the Q mind. Even then, he almost seemed to serve for a time as a symbol to which the document's elements and the community's self-understanding could be transferred, rather than as a true historical person, for not even the latest phase of Q develops any biography about him. That would come only with the Gospel of Mark.

Morphing from Wisdom to Jesus

It is recognized that several of the Q3 sayings have been recast from earlier Wisdom sayings. The best example is Jesus' lament for Jerusalem in Luke/Q

13:34, which is now thought to have been in its original form an oracle of Sophia/Wisdom. The hen is a material image for a divine being:

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings and you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken." [RSV]

Sayings such as this represent a genre of expression which pictures Wisdom as speaking directly to the world. This one would have been quite at home within a sect like the Q community; it hears Wisdom's voice and dire forecast. Earlier, the saying 'only the Son knows the Father' (Q 10:22) was seen to have roots in a pronouncement about the role of Wisdom as God's authorized intermediary. That all these things were understood to have been spoken by personified Wisdom may be revealed by that little slip of Luke's in 11:49 that a Q2 oracle in the same vein as the above lament—messengers sent from God have been rejected and killed—was spoken by "the Wisdom of God." *By the time we get to the latest stratum of Q, all these things are regarded as spoken by Jesus.*

In other words, between Q2 and (my) Q3, Wisdom has evolved into Jesus. In fact, Matthew, in his use of Q, has been interpreted as showing a tendency to regard Jesus as the incarnation of Wisdom herself. Was such an outlook already present in the Q document he used: one perhaps Luke did not preserve as clearly because he had not the same interests?

Scholars have been divided over how far to go with the relationship between Jesus and Wisdom. On the one hand, Jack Suggs (*op.cit.*, p.96) declares that Matthew's placement of Wisdom sayings on Jesus' lips indicates that he (and perhaps Q before him) is identifying Jesus *as* an incarnation of Wisdom, not merely her representative; although perhaps his view was something like that of Philo who declared that Moses was the most perfect recipient of the instillation of the Logos, without being an actual incarnation of the Logos. In respect of Q, one's interpretation is dependent on whether Q is regarded as seeing its Jesus as the literal "son of God." I suggest that Q stopped short of this. But it could have reflected the "*theios aner*" outlook of the time, that outstanding men could be infused with a divine spirit, giving them almost a superhuman nature; such a status the Q community could well have given its imagined founder, one infused with the spirit of Wisdom. Pagans at that very time were according a similar elevated quality to the emperor Augustus and his successors, and we can see the same thing in regard to Apollonius of Tyana.

On the other hand, Graham Stanton (*A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew*, p.369-76) argues against the idea that Jesus was ever envisioned as the incarnation of Wisdom. He feels the gender difference would have been a hurdle at which Jews would have balked, that Matthew's portrayal of Jesus as "meek and mild" (including in the Wisdom pronouncement of Matthew 11:28-30) is not entirely compatible with the usual personality given to Wisdom. However, such niceties may not have occurred or mattered to Matthew, or to Q. The Gospels abound in much more immediate contradictions where Jesus is concerned.

The first step would have been to imagine that Wisdom had appointed a representative, one who had founded the community and spoken her sayings. He had been, as in Q 7:35, her child. Scripture was full of the voice of Wisdom speaking "by the gate." Her myths, in various biblical and apocryphal writings contained the idea that she had come to earth and sought acceptance. A human embodiment of Wisdom may have been a natural development in the Q mind.

Ultimately, the very existence of the sayings collection itself would have induced the community to see it as having been spoken through a human mouth.

A critical requirement of the sectarian mentality is precedence. The Q people saw themselves as the latest in a long line of rejected prophets and messengers sent from God. This child of Wisdom would serve as the one who had first undergone that rejection, who had set the example for fortitude and defiance in its face. It was he who had first argued with the Pharisees. It was he who made authoritative pronouncements of faith and practice which continued to guide the community. As for miracles, there is no question that the Q prophets, as preachers of the kingdom, would have claimed the performance of signs and wonders, for every sectarian movement of the time had to possess that facility. These, especially miraculous healings, were the indispensable pointers to the kingdom. To preserve traditions about such miracles and assign them, with due exaggeration, to a founder would enshrine them in the best possible light.

The Q community's new Jesus would be a figure instantly recognizable. For he was the glorified embodiment of the Q preachers themselves. This is why he could be neither Messiah nor Redeemer. (And he may not have been identified with the sect's coming Son of Man.) Arnal, as seen in a previous chapter, has pointed out that Jesus as a character and personality is essentially 'subsumed' in the persons and activities of the Q prophets. He could do only what the Q people themselves had done from the beginning, except that he did it better. He opened the door for the entry of men and women into the new kingdom.

Was it really possible for the Q community to believe that such a founder had existed, to interpret the community's evolving record in this way? After the great upheavals of the Jewish War that disrupted Palestine from one end to the other, killing or displacing three-quarters of the population and destroying so much, a denial of any new view of the past could hardly be verified. The question was probably not even raised. (The dating of Q will be discussed in the next chapter.)

One might wonder why John the Baptist could not have served as an heroic founder. It almost seems that Q2 had been priming him for just such a role. But perhaps he was too familiar. Perhaps it was known that he had not been a wisdom teacher, that he could not have spoken the Q1 sayings. It is also likely that by the time of Q3, a rival sect had already claimed John as its founder. This situation might further have induced the Q community to develop a founder of its own, one superior to John. The Baptist could now serve the secondary role of precursor and herald, one who fitted scriptural expectation. Such a role would, at the same time, put the rivals in their place. Q's Dialogue between Jesus and John seems put together to accomplish those very purposes.

Even the earlier phase of Q2 declared John a herald, but a herald of the Son of Man, not a human teacher—a more acceptable form of subordination. In the aftermath of the Jewish War, perhaps those shoes John had referred to—the ones he was not worthy to untie—were seen as belonging to human feet.

When the Q document reached its latest redacted stage with the new Jesus, it could now serve as a true 'foundation document' for a classic sect. All it lacked was an actual biography of the founder. That deficiency would shortly be made up by the Gospel of Mark. But the deficiency meant that the 'biography' would have to be constructed out of something other than actual history, since none was available. Instead, Mark turned to scripture.

Are there precedents for a wholly invented founder figure? A later Christian Gnostic sect, the Elchasaites, is acknowledged to have probably begun much as did the present picture of Q's evolution. The Book of Elchasai (meaning 'Hidden Power') contained the record of the sect's inaugurating visions and teachings, but it later came to be understood as the record written by a man Elchasai, who had himself been the recipient of this knowledge from Heaven. The group known as the Ebionites (the "Poor") seems to have given rise in some people's minds to the figure of "Ebion," if we can judge by the progression from Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* I. 26,2) to pseudo-Tertullian (*Adv. omnes Haer.* 3). The existence of the Chinese philosopher Lao-Tse, the reputed fountainhead of Taoism but about whom nothing is known, has been seriously questioned, as has that of Confucius (see endnote 6). So, too, that of Lycurgus, the Spartan statesman to whom the invention of Sparta's social and political system was attributed. A more modern example is William Tell, a figure associated with the formation of the Swiss Federation in the 13th century. Tell did not put in an appearance in literature until close to 200 years after the event, and he is now judged not to have existed.

The historicity of Moses is also far from certain, and even more so is that of older patriarchs like Abraham. The ancient world was full of local and national traditions about gods, semi-divine or heroic figures involved in the beginnings of nations and communities (such as Romulus and Remus as founders of Rome), none of whom can confidently be regarded as historical today. Whether a famous legendary figure such as the Greek Heracles could be said to have existed in any form resembling the later mythology about him is highly unlikely, and even if based on a *type* of hero or warrior in prehistoric times, this hardly qualifies him as an "historical figure."

What's In a Name?

One intriguing question in regard to the Q founder remains, and it will lead us to the great crossroads alluded to above, that Mark and the Gospels which followed him ultimately served as a biography of the Q Jesus. That question is this: Why was the imagined Q founder *named* Jesus?

Why did he appear with the same designation as the divine Lord of the Christ cults and some of those other spiritual Son figures dotting the early Christian landscape? After all, even though the name meant "Savior" the Q Jesus was not

regarded as such—except perhaps in a general way, as the preachers of the Q community themselves might be said to offer salvation to those who responded to their message. Would this have been enough?

Or was the term by now so widespread among Jewish sectarian circles across the empire that the offer could not be refused? This would imply that the Q community, at least by the decade or so following the Jewish War, was aware of the spiritual Christ cults flourishing in the wider world, and thus of the higher significance of the name. If so, did this impel that move toward divinity perhaps discernible in the final phases of Q3?

Another possibility: could the latest stages of Q coincide with the earliest form of Mark, allowing for some crossover influence of Mark on Q? Some scholars have speculated that this overlap may have been the case.

But there is another way to approach the question. When Q3 first introduced a founder figure, was he in fact called "Jesus"?

Even if the name nowhere appeared in the Q text, even if another designation had been used by the Q3 redactors in passages such as the Dialogue between Jesus and John, Matthew and Luke, with Mark's Gospel in front of them, would inevitably have changed it to Jesus.

An alternative possibility: since Matthew and Luke took up Q to amalgamate it with Mark probably no earlier than the end of the century, and perhaps after the Q community's demise or passage on to other things, some intervening hand may already have altered Q3's original designation for its founder. Who might have done this and why? While Mark is unlikely to have possessed a copy of the Q document itself, he was certainly a part of the general kingdom milieu, and it may not have been too long after the Gospel was written that he or his community came into possession of a copy of Q itself. It may have been at this later time that the crossover influence from a newly-written Mark occurred. That is, the altering hand was someone in the Markan community who saw the Q document as a natural companion to the Gospel of Mark, and altered the name of Q's founder to correspond to Mark's humanized and historicized divine Christ named Jesus.

In fact, did Matthew and Luke each inherit the two documents, Q and Mark, from a common source: the Markan community? Did they arrive by the same post, so to speak? And while Mark or his community had not undertaken to redactionally integrate the two documents, Matthew and Luke did precisely that, carrying the Jesus 'biography' and the story of the sect to a new level.

Such suggestions, of course, are only speculation. But speculation based on a reasoned consideration of the evidence is a valid exercise, and can be used to offer possible explanations where no firm evidence exists. The practice is far from unknown in New Testament research generally. There will be more to say on the question of the "Jesus" name and the interaction between Mark and Q in the next chapter.

Mark and Q: The Origin of the Gospels

A Resounding Silence

When it was realized more than a century ago that Q contained no reference to any death and resurrection for its founder Jesus, there were scholars who questioned Q on that basis, claiming that no Christian document recording the sayings and deeds of Jesus could possibly have failed to mention these events. Moreover, nothing spoke of a sacrificial or redemptive role for him. Why would the Q community have ignored the central message of Christianity? Why would they have shown no interest in Jesus' acts of salvation? Surely they would not have been ignorant of what had happened to him when he made his fateful sojourn to Jerusalem.

Did no sayings, it was asked, like those which were part of the passion story, the establishment of the Eucharist at a Last Supper, words from the cross: did none reach the community back in Galilee, to be added to the collection? Jesus' defiant Son of Man proclamation before the High Priest is not to be found in Q, nor anything from the prophecies of the "Little Apocalypse" delivered to Jesus' disciples in front of the Temple (in Mark 13 and parallels) about the coming misfortunes and the "abomination of desolation," no prediction of the arrival of the Son of Man in glory. These and other sayings would have provided the prophetic stratum of the Q collection with a fitting climax. For it is a cold, hard fact that none of the elements of the Jerusalem phase of the Gospels appear in Q.

Another puzzling absence is that of the term "Christ"—the Messiah. The Gospels make the issue of the disciples' perception of Jesus a central part of his Galilean ministry. Jesus in Mark 8:28 asks his disciples: "Who do men say that I am?" And Peter replies: "You are the Messiah." Yet no suggestion that Jesus is the Christ, no reference to the concept itself, ever surfaces in Q.

A number of explanations have been offered to deal with these omissions. As noted earlier, modern scholars such as Burton Mack and John Dominic Crossan create a great divide between Galilee and Jerusalem, as though the one world had no contact with or interest in the other. But there are too many anomalies created by such a scenario. Not only the Gospels, but the entire body of later Christian tradition portrays certain disciples who were involved in Jesus' Galilean ministry as accompanying him to Jerusalem. James the Just, the head of the Jerusalem church (to whom Paul witnesses), is supposed to have been Jesus'

blood brother, so we can assume he would have maintained connections with the family and circle back home in Galilee.

If a group of Jesus' followers in Galilee had established a community there to preserve and propagate his teachings, such people would hardly have remained ignorant about, or have been uninterested in, what subsequently happened to him in Jerusalem. They would hardly have remained impervious to the *input* from those in Jerusalem who responded to his death and perceived resurrection by establishing a whole other "tradition" about Jesus, one that regarded him not only as the Messiah but as the Son of God and Savior of the world. When that movement spread outward from Jerusalem, did it bypass Galilee? Did it leave that earlier response in some isolated, uncontaminated enclave, interested solely in Jesus' Galilean preaching? Would Jesus' Jerusalem followers and family members who had accompanied him from Galilee not have brought home the new message, the new Son and Savior response—not to mention details about the trial and crucifixion, or sayings of Jesus associated with those events? Many of these things would have had natural connections with much of the expression of the kingdom community. How could they not have found their way into the Q collection? It is virtually impossible that the Q community, over a period of a few decades, could have remained unaffected by what was being made of Jesus by a whole other apostolic movement proceeding out of Jerusalem.

By the same token, we might ask similar questions in the other direction. If Jesus went off to Jerusalem, he was presumably accompanied by followers who had been with him in Galilee. It is reasonable to assume that some of them would have joined in the new response to him after his death. Certainly the Gospels and Acts portray it that way. But did those followers not have any influence within the new movement proceeding from Jerusalem? Did others who were involved in it refuse to hear anything about Jesus' Galilean teachings, about his miracles and healings, his conflicts with the establishment? We must assume so, since the surviving record of the Jerusalem movement, the letters of Paul and other New Testament epistles, show no elements of the Galilean Tradition, no trace of the preaching, miracle-working prophet of the kingdom.

The suggestion has been made that the two Traditions do not belong together, and that we could clinch the argument if it could be shown that the ignorance on the part of the Jerusalem Tradition concerning anything to do with Jesus' ministry in Galilee also extended in the other direction. Thus far, the latter would seem to be the case. The first sign of the two Traditions coming together is found in the Gospel of Mark.

The Construction of Mark

Traditional approaches to the Gospel of Mark have centered on dividing it between the ministry of Jesus and the passion story. Scholars have postulated that the story of Jesus' trial and crucifixion had an independent existence in early Christian tradition; that it developed over the decades through oral transmission and was perhaps set down in some primitive written form. Mark, when he came

to write his Gospel, it is said, took this pre-existing block of passion material, did some reshaping, and then constructed an elaborate preface. He fashioned a ministry out of other units of tradition which were circulating about Jesus but which had few if any narrative elements attached to them. In other words, Mark's teachings, miracles and stories about controversy with the establishment were separate pieces of tradition which he himself organized into a coherent sequence, giving Jesus a ministry which moved from Galilee to Jerusalem and led into the passion account.

But there is no evidence in the early record that the passion as a separate account with an identifiable sequence and set of events existed before Mark.¹³⁹ As we have seen, neither its details nor its overall picture can be found in the epistles and other documents of early Christianity, even in those containing a death and resurrection kerygma. It is not found in Q at any stage. Mark's passion story can be shown to be his own literary construction, based on a biblical precedent. Neither its larger pattern, nor even its individual parts, which make sense only in the context of Mark's overall construction, can be derived through oral transmission. And virtually all of the story's details are reworked passages in scripture, using the process of "midrash."

The other objection is that those separate units of tradition concerning Jesus' Galilean ministry, the miracles, the controversies, and especially the teachings, all supposedly drawn on by the evangelists, are either not to be found in the early record or are not associated with a Jesus figure. The cultic Jesus was never given an earthly ministry. The epistles and other documents containing ethical maxims resembling those in the Gospels were never identified as coming from him. There was an equal silence on miracles, on conflict with the religious authorities. Mark seemingly had no biographical Jesus material to make use of.

Yet the author of the first Gospel did not invent out of nothing. Just as Paul brought new interpretations of his own to the prevailing intermediary Son faith, so too did this first evangelist perform an innovative recasting of the ideas and activities which were a part of his own world. All this suggests that we should discard the traditional division of the Gospel of Mark into ministry and passion, and substitute a division which cuts across the entire Gospel: one part based on the Galilean Tradition, the preaching of the kingdom as embodied in Q; the other part on the suffering Savior idea current in the Jerusalem Tradition and preached by Paul, though there is no evidence—other than the most general and circumstantial—that Mark had any direct contact with Paul's activity or writings.

It is possible, however, that Mark's channel of contact or involvement with the cultic Christ movement was through a descendant of the circle around Peter, rather than of Paul himself. While both may have preached a heavenly sacrificial Christ, Paul had undoubtedly developed a much more sophisticated christology than the Jerusalem circle he was in contact and uneasy alliance with. This would explain why Mark and the Synoptics betray virtually none of the sophisticated Pauline christology surrounding the Son and Savior. The Markan Savior seems to have had poorer roots.

Cutting a Ministry from Q Cloth

The case has been argued that Mark did not possess a copy of the Q document. We can cite the fact that Mark fails to include in his own Gospel virtually all the teachings which Matthew and Luke reveal were present in Q. This includes the radical, often enlightened sayings of Q1 and the powerful prophetic sayings of Q2. Though explanations have been offered as to why Mark would deliberately have chosen not to include any of these in his Gospel, such explanations are unconvincing. The appeal of such material within Mark's own context would have been too overwhelming for him to pass it up. Besides, the echoes of Q that do exist in his Gospel, which everyone acknowledges, are not substantially different from some of the things which he would supposedly have rejected. Thus, it seems safe to say that no copy of Q, at least in a form resembling the one used by Matthew and Luke, rested on Mark's writing table.

And yet, it is equally evident that the evangelist must have been familiar with the Q community and traditions; he was almost certainly part of the movement itself. The ministry of Jesus in Mark is cut from Q-type cloth. Mark's Jesus preaches the kingdom. His ministry is set in Galilee. It is intimately connected at its outset with John the Baptist who is portrayed as Jesus' herald. The nature of the preaching mission, the itinerant activities of the apostles in Mark, is much the same as the Cynic-style activities of the Q preachers. Mark is apocalyptic in the same way Q is. The Son of Man as an anticipated End-time judge appears in both, although Mark's Jesus is clearly identified with the Son of Man. There are several sayings in Mark which are very close to equivalents in Q. The drawing out of devils is an activity and an issue of contention in both. (Mark has his own Beelzebub scene.) He too condemns his generation for demanding a sign.

Thus the way to regard the Gospel of Mark, in its portrayal of Jesus as a preacher of the kingdom, is that it has carried the Q ethos one step further. If the latest stratum in Q has added a founder to its picture of the community's origins, one who instituted the Q teachings and activities, then Mark has given us the next step in the process. He has taken the biographical impulse and run with it.

The preaching of the kingdom as epitomized in the Q document extracted from Matthew and Luke was not restricted to one specific circle or community. Since a central element on the Q scene is the itinerant nature of the preaching missionaries, it must have covered a certain amount of territory. That territory may have extended outside Galilee and into Syria, for a tangential development on the original Q1 stratum of sayings, the Gospel of Thomas, ended up in northeast Syria. The community of the Didache (late 1st century), while it has no Q Jesus evident on its pages (see Appendix 8 [p.681] for the Didache's lack of an historical Jesus), is clearly part of the same itinerant prophetic movement. It records teachings reminiscent of early Q—though with no attribution to Jesus. The community of the Didache has also been located in Syria.

Consequently, it is possible to envision a widespread phenomenon covering many communities, not all of which would necessarily possess a copy of the Q document itself, or be as familiar with its elements as those which did. (It is even

feasible that Q was the product of one particular community, with a handful of individuals responsible over a couple of generations with keeping it up to date.) It is thus quite feasible that whoever produced the Gospel of Mark had no Q document to hand and yet was familiar with the general traditions which lay behind it—indeed, was an active participant in those traditions. If some of Q's itinerant prophets frequented the Markan community, and if the Son of Man expectation was vital there, and if those visiting prophets as well as the Markan community leaders themselves were in the habit of employing various sayings such as we find in Q, then we have a state of affairs which could have produced the underlying content found in Mark's ministry of Jesus.

In addition, it seems likely that Mark is party to another feature of the Q evolution as well. He is aware that at least some part of the kingdom movement possesses the "memory" of a founder: the same founder recorded in the Q document in its third stratum, the speaker of the sayings, the one who had first engaged the religious establishment in Galilee by proclaiming the "gospel of God" and the arrival of the kingdom. What name for that founder may have been in use at this time, what name was initially recorded in the Q document, cannot be determined. The name Jesus, or Jesus Christ, Mark could have derived from the other dimension he has brought to his "Gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God," namely the kerygma of the suffering, dying and rising Savior. Certainly, he did not get the designation of "Messiah" (Christ) from Q thought or usage, although the Son of Man is a type of messianic figure.

All four Gospels are now generally regarded as coming from the Levant region, either from northern Palestine or Syria. Burton Mack tentatively places Mark in Sidon or Tyre, but this may be too urban a location in view of the Q content. Some like to claim that the author of Mark did not have an intimate knowledge of Galilean geography, since his Jesus comes and goes in a sequence that does not always make sense when plotted on a map. But this is not a serious objection in a story Mark knows is not intended to be history. In any case, we need not locate him too far from Galilee in order to allow for such geographical inconsistencies.

Turning the Q Founder into a Suffering Figure

If Mark's community, as reflected in his Gospel, is a part of the movement evidenced in the Q document, then he has built his picture of the ministry of Jesus on a Q foundation. But he has added a whole other dimension which is found nowhere in Q: a Jesus who suffers, dies and is resurrected.

That dimension is not confined to the appended passion narrative. Mark has worked in passion motifs all through the Q-style ministry which precedes it. To the teachings, the miracles, the controversies with the Pharisees, the apocalyptic expectation centering on the Son of Man—all of which are part of the Q experience—to these Mark has added the passion element as part of the plot line. Thus Mark's Jewish establishment, reacting against Jesus' liberal teachings about ritual purity and Sabbath rules, against his claim that he has the right to

forgive sins and generally act on his own authority, conspire to kill him. Mark expands the catalogue of Son of Man sayings which are part of Q's apocalyptic outlook by inventing prophecies by Jesus that the Son of Man (now himself) shall suffer, die and be resurrected (8:31, 9:31, 10:33-34). Mark also associates the Q Jesus with the Messiah and styles him Son of God, although he hedges this association—for reasons which remain obscure. He has Jesus admonish his disciples, along with assorted onlookers and exorcised demons, to keep such things secret.

Thus the Q founder has not only been given a biography, a family and hometown, a structured ministry in which to place all the elements associated with him in the Q document, he has been linked with the fundamental element of the Jerusalem Tradition. He has been brought to that city to undergo the death and resurrection which had always been part of that Tradition but was never identified with an earthly time and place. As we have seen, this entire other dimension of death and resurrection at Jerusalem, and the preparation for it which Mark has carefully inserted into his pre-passion ministry, are not to be found in Q or any of the wider circle of documents related to it (the Gospel of Thomas and the Didache). We are therefore justified in concluding—supported by the literary analysis of the passion narrative to come—that the link between Q and Jerusalem is Mark's innovation, that no Q founder ever went, or was ever regarded as having gone, to Jerusalem, never got himself executed, and certainly never rose from his tomb.

Mark's Purpose

The great question in all of this is: Why did Mark create such a "Gospel" and how did he present it to his community?

Just as the Q-like picture of Mark's Gospel ministry can only be explained by assuming a participation by Mark and his community in the kingdom preaching movement, the death and resurrection dimension to his Gospel must relate to the cultic Christ which people such as Peter and Paul had preached. Mark betrays no intimate knowledge of Paul or his christology, but their one feasible point of contact may be the deriving of the Gospel Last Supper scene from the Pauline myth of the sacred meal, the "Lord's Supper" in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, though even here the connecting route is probably indirect. The words in Mark describing Jesus' establishment of the Eucharist are only roughly similar to those of Paul. This would be in keeping with the haphazard development of a tradition which was not based on an historical event and not common to all early Christian expression. As for the empty tomb story, Mark shows no knowledge of the list of appearances Paul enumerates in 1 Corinthians 15:5-7; instead, he introduces his own characters in the form of the women.

Yet the cultic Christ is an intimate part of Mark's Gospel. Might we presume that Mark's community was a part of this cultic scene, that it shared a Pauline-type faith in a divine Son even if this was not directly due to contact with Paul? (We know of no proselytizing by Paul in Galilee or southern Syria, but he was

far from the only one going about preaching the Son.) One might ask how a Q-type community involved in the preaching of the kingdom had come to put one foot in the cultic Christ camp, especially at a time before any link between the two had been made. But perhaps this was one of those unusual happenings in history, a point of mutation that produces an unexpected swerve into bold new territory. The Gospel of Mark would be the consequence of that event, marking the inauguration of a new direction that was to shape the future of the world.

The alternative is to suppose that Mark himself had come into contact with the cultic Christ movement and decided to link it with his own Q traditions in a new allegorical "Gospel." That is always possible (and it would make him the most influential individual in the history of the world—something he may be in any case). But would that personal contact have impelled him to go to the trouble he did, and would his community have accepted his product?

In fact, some of the Gospel's content suggests that the Markan community was involved in a type of cultic Christ belief. Scholars recognize that some of Mark's scenes are meant as "lessons" for the community. The triple denial by Peter would show that even someone of the stature of a chief apostle could deny the Lord. The Gethsemane scene held the moral that doubts and fears could beset even the greatest among them, but ultimately one needed to hold to the faith and submit to the will of God. Inclusion of the Pauline Supper could have served a purpose similar to Paul's own: to provide a mythical precedent for the communal meal practiced by the community. None of these things would Mark have derived from the Q ethos, since they are not to be found there.

In sum, the geographical location of Mark's community, perhaps in southern Syria, may have brought it into contact with both the Galilean Q movement preaching the kingdom, and the cultic Christ movement which we know was especially strong in the region of Antioch (northwestern Syria). People whose names have been forever lost could well have found both traditions appealing; they could have regarded elements in both as complementary.

One had a great moral teacher of the kingdom, a prophet of the imminent End they were all expecting, one who was identified as a child of Wisdom herself and as the Son of Man who would arrive to establish the kingdom. The other had a divine Son of God who was regarded as the Messiah, who had redeemed the world through a death and resurrection in the spiritual realm. The latter was a cult which also had a communal meal and preached an apocalyptic transformation of the world when their Messiah would arrive from heaven. Why not follow—and even integrate—both?

Nothing could better illustrate the sort of situation in which religious syncretism takes place.

Eventually, making a concrete association between the two must have struck someone as a grand idea. How to do it? By creating a story, a 'new truth' embodied in a symbolic tale with connections to the past Jewish heritage, constructed through the process of midrash. If the spiritual Christ inhabited scripture and spoke from there, if inspired gospels like Paul's were derived from

elements of the sacred writings, what better source for 'details' of an earthly life than scripture itself: not only all those passages which traditionally had been interpreted as referring to the Messiah, but as many others as could be pressed into service? Such a Gospel would combine all the elements, finding parallels between the activities of Christ in the spirit world and the forces he encountered there, and those of the Q movement and its newly-envisioned founder.

Mark cleared his writing desk and started working.

History, the Gospel Jesus and the Q Founder

Could Mark have considered his story to be historically true? This seems highly doubtful, if only because he put it together himself out of discrete pieces. Much of the ministry details, including Jesus' miracles, were fashioned from Old Testament precedents, and virtually the entire passion narrative was constructed out of passages from scripture. We can assume he was not building on any tradition of the Q founder's death in Jerusalem, since no such thing appears in Q, not even in what were probably the latest editions of the document used by Matthew and Luke.

Did Mark present his Gospel to his readership as actual history? That, too, seems doubtful. One could hardly fathom why he would want to perpetrate such a deception. The community would probably realize the passion's dependence on the sacred writings, and the most experienced among them could undoubtedly recognize midrash when they saw it—unlike most subsequent Christians.

For the Gospel to have been accepted at all implies that its author was a respected leader or teacher within the community, a specialist in scriptural study. His allegorical construction would have served to enhance the faith and understanding of the community in its dual involvement with the kingdom movement and belief in the spiritual redeeming Christ. Before long, that duality would fuse into a multi-layered unity—which is the way even modern critical scholarship, in its Twin Traditions concept, regards full-grown Christianity—and the new religion would be unable to look back over the receding, lost horizon and see its true beginnings in disconnected diversity.

A second question is this. If so much of the Gospel Jesus was fiction and acknowledged as such, how did Mark—and his community—relate his Jesus of Nazareth to the founder figure we see in the Q document, and with whom we have presumed they were probably familiar?

Since the community, at least initially, must have recognized Mark's story of Jesus as a symbolic tale of the cultic Christ linked in midrashic fashion with the Q founder and the history of the movement, no problem should have arisen. Modern literature has numerous examples of historical fiction based on figures in history, in which the author would never suggest that the actual historical figure had undergone all the experiences he portrays in his novel. Yet the author's fictional story line may well be designed to provide an insight into the personality and significance of that historical figure and his time, and by extension, our own understanding of ourselves and the world. If this historical

novelist were to construct the details of his fictional story line from passages in scripture, we would call his product "midrash."

While our novelist would naturally base the story of his characters on known historical elements, the problem in Mark is that we have no independent corroboration outside the Gospels, or derived from them, to establish any known historical elements beyond basic background features such as the figures of Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate, or certain social and political conditions of the day (though some of these are anachronistic and belong rather to Mark's time). In regard to Jesus himself and the events of his life, nothing identifiable as "history remembered" remains when all the scripturally-based features are removed—both, as we shall see, in regard to the details and to the overall story lines.

The Gospel of Mark, at its inception, may have had no greater purpose than to provide an inspiring 'foundation document' for the community, an allegorical story to embody its faith and principles, and to put flesh on its founding figure, both echoing important elements of Jewish history. As such, it would have rested for a time on the shelf of the Markan community, serving for its edification. But it would not have been regarded as an historical account of someone who had actually undergone death and resurrection in Jerusalem. We might go so far as to say, in view of the lack of post-resurrection appearances in the first edition of Mark, that the latter 'event' symbolized the resurrection after death which the community members themselves could look forward to, as much as it may have allegorized the spiritual rising after death which the cultic Christ had undergone.

It cannot be assumed that 'knowledge' of a Q founder was universal within the entire kingdom movement, because we have evidence against this. The Didache, though the product of a community which had obvious affiliations with the Galilean Tradition, nevertheless shows no sign of a founder Jesus (see Appendix 8 [p.681]). Not even the Baptist puts in an appearance. Most scholars have located the community of the Didache in Syria. If they are right, this would indicate that the kingdom movement was fairly widespread but that the more specific Q traditions as embodied in the later stages of the written document were not. This silence in the Didache suggests that the development of the Q founder was perhaps a fairly narrowly-based event. It may have been confined to a circle in close proximity to the group possessing the document.

The Didache does, on the other hand, have a "servant/child Jesus" within its eucharistic prayers (ch.9) who seems to represent a type of spiritual intermediary Son idea. This is supported by a reference to those who "peddle Christ" (ch.12), although the meaning here is enigmatic and its connection to "the Son" found in the prayers is not clear. However, it would suggest that a degree of syncretism between the kingdom movement and the Christ cult, such as we see in the Markan community, was not an isolated phenomenon.

It is true that the Gospel of Mark does not portray its Jesus in the elevated fashion of the Christ cult. Indeed, it is sometimes pointed out that Mark's Jesus is scarcely divine, certainly not overtly so. He is not the Logos or personified Wisdom of the epistles, the emanation and image of God involved in the process

of creation. None of these things are present in Mark's Gospel, and even the soteriology is primitive. Mark barely develops the concept of Atonement or vicarious suffering, and simply says (10:45) that Jesus has come to surrender his life "as a ransom for many." This is not much different from the concept in 4 Maccabees (early in the 1st century) that the righteous martyr's suffering and death will be considered by God to have a redemptive efficacy on all of Israel. Perhaps Mark's roots in the more earthbound Galilean Tradition kept a lid on his portrayal of the divine Jesus.

The Later Synoptics

After a certain amount of time had passed—perhaps a couple of decades or so—a knowledge of Mark's allegorical creation spread to other communities, probably in the area of southern Syria. (Matthew is thought to be located here, perhaps near Antioch; Luke's provenance is more difficult to estimate.) In two different places, and probably at two different times—Luke is usually regarded as later than Matthew—in communities which may themselves have constituted further examples of Q and Christ cult syncretism, two scholars of the scriptures came in contact with the Gospel of Mark and saw its appealing possibilities.

Matthew and Luke also possessed editions of the Q document, with its 'Jesus' figure now at the root of the movement. Alternatively, as suggested in the previous chapter, the Markan community may in the meantime have acquired a copy of Q, and Mark and Q could have traveled together as complementary documents. One way to regard the Gospels of Matthew and Luke is that they were designed to make up the perceived deficiency created by Mark's failure to incorporate the Q material.¹⁴⁰

With Jesus of Nazareth functioning as a symbolic character for Mark, there may still be scope for uncertainty as to whether he regarded such a figure as having lived. The same uncertainty faces us in regard to the later Gospels. The fact that Matthew and Luke could alter Mark any way they saw fit, even in regard to Jesus' teachings and activities, his character and intentions, shows that they, too, were still treating him as a symbolic entity, having no illusions that they were constructing or preserving an accurate biography or record of history. It is possible that they and their communities regarded their Gospels as a general representation of the Q founder, whether they had known of such a figure previously or not. Even if they felt no compunction about making changes and their own use of scripture, it is possible that Matthew and Luke thought that the passion part of Mark's Gospel was basically historical.

Matthew carried the midrashic approach to new heights, pointing to Jesus doing this or that in order to fulfill such-and-such a scriptural passage. Again, it is difficult to say whether the evangelist had any concept of history in mind or whether he saw the principle of scriptural fulfillment as itself symbolic. Scripture was not only the medium which revealed the spiritual Christ, it may also have been seen as prefiguring the community's own experiences. For all the Gospels, at their most symbolic level, represent the faith and reform movement itself.

When that symbolism moves in lockstep with the identifiable and specific agenda of each evangelist (and presumably, by extension, of his community), it is clear that Jesus of Nazareth, in each Gospel, is simply a "front" for the particular set of theological and sectarian interests of those later Christian communities. When he gives directives which establish rules of conduct and mission practice, when he prophesies situations that exist in the later movement, when those directives, prophecies and authorizations differ between Gospels because the purposes and interests they are meant to serve are different, we know that the picture of Jesus from any of them has nothing to do with the presentation of history. This is particularly evident in the Gospel of John.

After a generation or two had passed following Mark's creation, there were multiple versions of the story of Jesus of Nazareth. Perhaps not too long after Luke, another community further north in Syria, possessing a Revealer Son and known later as the community of John, joined the company as well, creating a rather different version reflecting a proto-gnostic outlook. If such Gospels were used as preaching aids and for missionary work beyond their own communities, the vivid elements contained in them would soon have become vulnerable to misunderstanding and taken on a life of their own. Symbolism moved toward reality, allegory toward history. Thus the scene was set in the wider Christian world for regarding Mark's figure and his story as historical. By this time, the political advantages in regarding them as such would have been compelling, as competing churches sought to ground their own—sometimes rival—beliefs and traditions in something more concrete than scripture and revelation through the Spirit. They could appeal to more than right spirits from God as opposed to wrong ones from Satan, as in 1 John 4. At the same time, growing communities encompassing people of all walks of life may have felt the need for a more accessible and less esoteric Savior figure. The emergence of the Gospel Jesus of Nazareth onto the stage of history eventually became an unstoppable force.

An Allegorical Creation

Modern literature has produced rather little in the way of allegories. An allegorical tale tells a symbolic story, with plot and characters representing spiritual, moral or other abstract meanings. Often the characters have names which represent their roles, and real-world figures and situations may be present in the undergirding of the story, as in historical novels. The most famous modern allegory is undoubtedly *The Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan written around 1685. To get an idea of its nature, we can quote from the Wikipedia page:

Christian, an everyman character, is the protagonist of the allegory, which centers itself in his journey from his hometown, the "City of Destruction" ("this world"), to the "Celestial City" ("that which is to come": Heaven) atop Mt. Zion. Christian finds himself weighed down by a great burden, the knowledge of his sin, which he believed came from his reading "the book in his hand," (the Bible). This burden, which would cause him to sink into Tophet (hell), is Christian's acute, immediate concern that impels him to the

crisis of what to do for deliverance....Christian leaves his home, his wife and children to save himself when his attempt to persuade them to go with him fails. Two men of Destruction City, Obstinate and Pliable, follow Christian to persuade him to return and are unsuccessful. Pliable then decides to accompany Christian on the path...

Here, all the characters and places have symbolic names which essentially describe themselves. The plot is a fictitious story representing the search for salvation and what one must go through to achieve it. No one who first read Bunyan's allegory believed that it recounted a true tale, especially since the allegorical devices are so obvious. But what if the author had chosen to make them more subtle? What if he were representing through much more complex characters the actual workings of his personal religious circle? What if he sought to render those characters in terms of the rich heritage of past figures and processes as recorded in the Jewish scriptures' own story of divinely-directed salvation?

Rationalists among modern Christians (and Jews) are known to consider many of the tales of the Old Testament to be allegory. At least, they are thrown onto that interpretation because they are no longer able to take them as literal—although they were no doubt meant to be literal when set down. The tale of creation, of Adam and Eve in Eden, the serpent and the Fall, are regarded as myths representing complex and otherwise inaccessible processes in the evolution of the universe and of human culture. Later in the Hebrew bible, the book of Job is an allegory in spirit, and intended as such. The book of Esther is treated by scholars as fictional, a morality tale, and possibly the book of Ruth.

In a sense, the myths of the Hellenistic savior gods are allegories of a sort. In their ancient and complex development they may not have been specifically designed as allegories, but in their secret interpretations in cult observance they were probably treated in just that way, symbolizing the manner in which the gods, through their mythical activities, guaranteed salvation for the cults' initiates. We have no written example of such a thing where the mysteries are concerned, only hints and indicators. But it so happens that we possess a prime example of an allegorical tale of this nature in the gnostic Thomas writings. It is called *The Hymn of the Pearl*.

The Hymn of the Pearl

This tale comprises part of the Acts of Thomas, one of a group of writings probably composed in Edessa (northeastern Syria) during the 2nd and 3rd centuries, representing a mildly gnostic strain of Christianity. (The Gospel of Thomas is a part of that literature.) The hymn reflects the myth that the soul of the individual, belonging to the kingdom of light, has been sent from the spiritual world into the world of matter. Here, in a body of matter, it exists in a state of sleep and unawareness of its true self, hampered and persecuted by the rulers and forces of the world, until it is awakened by a saving message. With its knowledge restored, the soul returns to its heavenly home.

The hymn (in the first person) tells the tale of a young boy sent out from the palace of his father, a King in Mesopotamia, directed to travel to Egypt where he is to seize and bring back a pearl guarded by a dragon. In Egypt he puts on local clothing, but when he is drugged by the Egyptians he soon finds himself losing the memory of his origin and identity. After many years his parents, hearing of his plight, send him a letter in the form of an eagle whose voice reawakens his memory. After snatching the pearl from the dragon, he sheds his Egyptian clothing, and with the help of the eagle, is led back to his parents' kingdom of light. There he puts on the jeweled garment he had left behind as a boy and recognizes his true self in a mirror. Wearing it, he enters the realm of peace and the presence of his father the King.

The Hymn does not identify itself as an allegory, and its interpretation is the responsibility of the reader. Since it does not contain any specifically Christian elements, some scholars think that it had a previous existence in a non-Christian (and non-Jewish) setting and was later incorporated into the Thomasine context. Some interpreters regard the child sent to Egypt (symbol of the world) as himself an actual Redeemer figure, sent from Heaven to recover the original soul fallen into matter—the Pearl. This reflects the so-called 'Redeemed Redeemer' concept which older scholarship found in the gnostic myth but which more recent scholarship has tended to reject, perhaps unjustifiably. In that case, we have here yet another example—pre-Christian—of the descending redeemer concept, including motifs of disguising himself from the powers of the lower world and being persecuted by them.¹⁴¹

The Gospels as allegory are, of course, much more complex than this relatively simple hymn (only 105 verses long). But Mark is telling more than a straightforward myth; he is recounting the meaning of his own faith community, which involves a syncretism of two separate movements. And he must integrate a background of Jewish scriptural heritage and mythology, as well as a combination of Jewish and pagan tradition. But like *The Pilgrim's Progress*, he is encapsulating a process, a new pathway to salvation which the kingdom community has laid out, including the vicissitudes that are faced on the path and the obstacles which the unresponsive and antagonistic have laid upon it. He is incorporating many lessons for the community. Taking a cue from Q, or its latest traditions, Mark has chosen to focus that complex picture on a symbolic character. His Jesus of Nazareth delivers the preaching of the new ethic and hope, he performs the miracles and prophecies which herald the kingdom, he engages in the controversy with the establishment. In his person he represents the soul of the movement, its claims for itself, its inspiration and pipeline from the Deity, its promise of resurrection through suffering and even death, and the guarantees of its heavenly Savior.

Many things lead us in the inevitable direction of allegory and fiction. The elements which make up Mark's story, which render it a supposed narrative based on real people and events, are entirely missing from the earlier record. The story itself has a profound ring of artificiality; it hangs together only in the

loosest of ways. Contradictions which betray multiple diverse sources abound; so too anachronisms. Things are said and done in rather obvious fashion to convey aspects of the community's faith and practices. As in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, some characters betray their symbolism in their names, a telltale mark of allegory. "Judas," meaning simply a Jew (*Ioudaios*), represents for Mark the perfidious Jew as stereotype, one who rejects the movement and persecutes its members. "Iscairiot" may mean "False One."¹⁴² Robert Price points out that "Jairus," whose daughter Jesus awakens, has a name meaning "he will awaken"; the blind Bar-Timaeus whom Jesus heals (10:26f) is in Aramaic *Bar-Teymah*, which means "son of poverty," a suitable name for a beggar. In Luke (19:2), we have an almsgiver with a name meaning "to give alms."¹⁴³ Just as a novelist might introduce a character who is a psychic and call her Claire Voyance.

In the record outside the Gospels, in almost all Christian literature until the mid-2nd century, one looks in vain for any knowledge of characters such as Mary Magdalene, Joseph of Arimathea, Simon of Cyrene, minor apostles like Thomas, Andrew and Philip, the unnamed criminals crucified with Jesus—even Mary mother of Jesus or Joseph his father, the former surfacing only in the original Ignatian letters. Some of these are clearly introduced to further the plot line. Simon of Cyrene's assistance to carry the cross shows how desperate was Jesus' condition. Joseph of Arimathea serves as a device to place Jesus in a tomb from which his rising can be demonstrated. (Normally, the victim would have been thrown into a common grave, if not left out to be fed on by carrion.) And that non-Gospel record shows no knowledge of places like Calvary and the empty tomb; they are never mentioned let alone regarded as holy sites.¹⁴⁴

Dating Mark and Q

When was the Gospel of Mark written? Estimates range from 50 to 150 CE, both ends of the spectrum being equally radical and probably equally unlikely. The commonest date range is within a single decade, 65-75. Such estimates are based almost entirely on Mark's apocalyptic content, particularly the Little Apocalypse in chapter 13.

There Jesus tells his disciples that of the great Temple buildings they are marveling over, not one stone will be left standing on another. Biblical literalists have no trouble envisioning Jesus as possessing true powers of prophecy and forecasting such a thing ahead of time. But the more sober-minded judge that this sentiment did not originate with Jesus. Rather, it reflects Mark's knowledge of the fact that the Temple *had* been thrown down at the climax of the Jewish War (66-70). Or it suggests that Mark wrote shortly after the war's onset, and he did not need to be clairvoyant to see that the Romans would prevail and punish the Jews by destroying their Temple.

The most serious problem with the pre-70 scenario is that chapter 13 as a whole suggests that its author is allowing for the passage of a certain amount of time *after* the war before the End finally arrives. But it is unlikely that anyone of Mark's mindset, witnessing in the year 67 or 68 the build-up to the approaching

cataclysm, or the disintegration of the Jewish situation as the Romans invaded Palestine and encircled the city, would not have been caught up in the drama of the moment and been convinced that the End, with the arrival of the Son of Man, lay just around the corner. There would have been no motive or impulse to postulate any subsequent delay.

That the delay occurred seems obvious in 13:5-13. Jesus' prophecy of false Messiahs best applies to the time between the war and the end of the century. To judge by some of the epistles, it was during this period and even beyond that discord within Christian communities was most active, with one faction calling another "antichrist" and warning of those who were leading people into false doctrine. (Even in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, such issues are still very much alive.) In Mark 13:7, Jesus says that even after battles near and far, "the end is still to come." He talks of great wars between nations, of earthquakes and famines. In verse 10 he says: "Before the end, the Gospel must be proclaimed to all nations." This was a condition Mark would not likely consider fulfilled by the time of the Jewish War. The woes, the persecutions, the false Messiahs producing signs and wonders and misleading the faithful, these were part of the mythology of the coming age, its "birthpangs." All of this is yet to begin.

Thus it would seem that Mark's Jesus is accounting for a certain amount of time that has already passed after the war, during which the End has not arrived, though the atmosphere in the Markan community is that it can be expected some time soon. We know from the wider evidence that apocalyptic expectation was still rampant toward the end of the century. Revelation written in the 90s is evidence of that. Certain Jewish documents coming in the aftermath of the war, such as 4 Ezra, contain their own apocalyptic outlook, and these are not likely to have been fully written within only a few years. The legend that the emperor Nero was not dead but would return with armies from the east, the so-called *Nero redivivus* myth, must have required some time to develop after his death in 68. This myth seems to have been going strong in the latter years of the Flavian regime in the 90s. Thus Mark's strong apocalyptic flavor is as consistent with a date around 90 as it is with one around 70.¹⁴⁵

But a feature of Mark's Little Apocalypse may allow us to be specific to the early 90s. Its key element is the reference to the "abomination of desolation" (13:14) which threatened to be set up "where it should not be." Mark in creating this text was drawing midrashically on Daniel 11:31 and 1 Maccabees 1:54, both of which use the phrase to refer to the setting up of a pagan altar within the Temple sanctuary in the time of the Seleucid king Antiochus Epiphanes (167 BCE), which led to the Maccabean revolt. Antiochus also imposed the placement of pagan altars throughout Judea. This suggests that Mark has in mind a similar threat.

But is this referring to the fate of the Jerusalem Temple in the recent War, an event already accomplished? The whole tone of Mark's scene suggests that it is not a simple allusion to history placed in Jesus' mouth in the form of a prophecy. (In any case, no "abomination" was set up in the temple at the time of the War; it

was simply leveled.) If the "abomination of desolation" lies in the writer's—and the readers'—past, what is the purpose of the reference and its accompanying warnings? The latter must somehow be relevant to Mark's readers, even *directed* at them. He is not 'showing off Jesus' prophetic talents, since he inserts an aside at the very reference to the abomination of desolation—"let the reader understand"—an alert *by Mark to his readers* that this is something cryptic, something they are going to have to interpret. There would be no necessity for this if Jesus were referring to a future (for him) historical event every reader was familiar with. Rather, it has the same content and atmosphere as other passages in the Synoptics (and in Q) in which prophecies are made about future woes leading to the End and the coming of the Son of Man, what can be expected when he arrives and how best to prepare for it ahead of time, even if one does not know the hour.

If it referred to a past event of the War, the passage would make little sense. By the time the Romans had conquered Jerusalem and desecrated the Temple with their "abomination" (if this were meant simply to refer to their presence), the campaign would essentially have been over, the country overrun. There would be no thought of a man being "on his roof" or out "in his field" attending to normal chores, with still time to flee to the mountains. No, Mark is warning his readers who might be on roof or in field themselves to be ready to flee if or when something happens which he fears is imminent. The "abomination of desolation" is yet to occur, but it is threatening.

In Antiochus' time, altars had been set up throughout the country, with Jews ordered on pain of death to worship the Greek gods at them. This led Mattathias and his sons to defy the king's orders and start destroying the altars throughout Israel, killing apostates and the king's officers. 1 Maccabees 2:27-8 then says:

"Follow me," he [Mattathias] shouted through the town, "every one of you who is zealous for the law and strives to maintain the covenant." He and his sons took to the hills, leaving all their belongings behind in the town.

Mark incorporates the latter thought into his 13:14:

"But when you see 'the abomination of desolation' usurping a place which is not his (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must take to the hills,"

not stopping to take anything from the house, not even a coat. It has been noted that about the year 90 a closely similar situation existed in the reign of Domitian (81-96), when this emperor planned to force Jews—which would have included Christians, since the requirement applied to all Rome's subjects—to participate in the rites of emperor worship. While we do not know if there was any intention to set up special altars for the purpose, the parallel with the situation under Antiochus as recounted in 1 Maccabees is striking. This could well be the "abomination of desolation" Mark is referring to, the threatened practice of pagan rites to be established in all the empire's centers, which Christians could never agree to participate in.

We ought to conclude that the phrase "those in Judea" does not refer to literal Judeans but to Mark's readership, as a kind of code phrase. It would be pointless to construct a prophetic scene out of scripture and have Jesus warning a group of people who had nothing to do with that readership. Perhaps the "people of Judea" was used by Mark's community to highlight its self-understanding as the new people of God's promise.¹⁴⁶

Mark, through a prophecy by his Jesus character, is warning his community about this imminent eventuality, this new abomination. Taking his cue from 1 Maccabees, he advised them to "flee into the hills" as Mattathias and his sons had done. Because Mark has modeled this part of the scene on 1 Maccabees, we can rule out that any tradition about Jesus prophesying such a thing was being drawn on by him. And it would place the writing of Mark no more than two decades following the horrors of the Jewish War, so resonant of the crisis surrounding Antiochus, a time when the idea that the End and the arrival of the Son of Man was around the corner could still have been alive and vivid. As well, in a location like Syria this resonance makes much better sense than a directive to Christians in Rome to flee into hills.¹⁴⁷

There are those who point out that Mark has Jesus promise (13:30) that "this generation will live to see it all," an encouragement to his community that the arrival of the kingdom and the Son of Man must be imminent. Certainly, 50 or 60 years is the outside time within which such a prediction alleged to be made around the year 30 could still have had legitimacy. Yet if Mark were creating only a symbolic Jesus within a midrashic tale, such a limitation would not apply. The time limit of the promise needs to start from the point of Mark's writing.

Another factor tending to keep Mark within the bounds of the 1st century is its close relation to the Q ethos. Dating the different strata of the Q document is notoriously difficult, though most Q scholars judge the bulk of it as pre-Jewish War. In the Q2 prophetic layer, as in the warnings delivered to places like Capernaum, there is no suggestion that widespread destruction on the scale of the war has already occurred to fulfill the dire prediction of Luke/Q 10:15. Yet one element in Q seems to have the war in mind: Luke/Q 13:35. "Look, there is your house [meaning the Temple], forsaken by God." This looks back to a prophecy in Jeremiah 22:5, but it sees that prophecy as now fulfilled.

This verse is evidently a Wisdom oracle from some unknown wisdom book, placed in Jesus' mouth in the Q3 stratum. We don't know if the earlier version imputed to personified Wisdom spoke in terms of an unfulfilled prophecy. If not, then even parts of the Q2 stratum could conceivably be post-70. Given that parts of the Q movement probably existed outside the path of the Roman destruction, it is not infeasible that it survived the worst ravages of the war and the disruption created in the region. It has also been noted that in the Gospels, their portrayal of Pharisees active in Galilee is an anachronism, since this was a condition arising only after the Jewish War and their dispersal out of Judea. Since Q2 entails this picture of a Pharisaic presence, perhaps that stratum must be dated following the Jewish War as well, which would push Mark some distance beyond 70.

If the later strata of Q can be located a decade or more after the Jewish War, when did the Q community or the movement as a whole die out? One might say that apocalyptic expectation *never* dies out, as we well know today, and millenarian ideas (the expectation of a thousand-year reign of the Messiah) were flourishing into the 2nd century—they are attributed to Papias—and beyond. If the Didache's provenance and dating near the start of the 2nd century are correct, a Q-type milieu still existed in Syria at that time, although elements of the Christ cult were creeping in. Beyond that point, the specific Q ethos is in evidence only in the later Synoptics.

If Matthew and Luke, based on a likely dating of Mark around 90, are to be located within the first two decades of the 2nd century,¹⁴⁸ this means that the Q document still existed by that time, as they made use of it. But by then the Galilean-style kingdom movement, more than half a century old, may have run out of steam, and the Q document could have been its surviving legacy.

To return to the dating of Mark. If we place the first Gospel too early, especially in the 50-70 range, this creates the grand anomaly that no evidence of the possession of Gospel documents within the wider Christian world can be perceived for at least 75 years after the first one was penned. Quotations from written Gospels do not appear before the middle of the 2nd century, in the writings of Justin Martyr and possibly the homily known as 2 Clement. (See chapter 30 for a survey of the lack of knowledge of written Gospels in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers.) Even though allowance can be made for the likelihood that the Gospels rested for a generation or two within the small circle of communities where they were produced, this long an interval seems difficult to accept. The estimation of Mark as written around the year 90 fits well as a compromise between these considerations.

One also has to regard the very limited biographical data about Jesus found in the letters of Ignatius (if not by him, then by someone writing soon after) as the first sign of a spread of ideas from Mark's creation beyond the immediate area where it was produced. Since Ignatius never appeals to a written Gospel to support his accusations against those who deny his basic biography of Jesus, we can assume he had not encountered a copy of such a document. Ignatius' letters are traditionally dated in the first or second decade of the 2nd century. While that dating has been called into question (as part of a more radical dating of the Gospels to the mid-2nd century) I regard it as defensible, even if the letters are pseudonymous. Thus, dating Mark around 90, with Matthew following perhaps a decade or so later, would mesh with Ignatius (and others), living some distance further north, hearing the echoes of such writings some time early in the 2nd century and finding the idea of an historical Christ an appealing concept. We must remember that he was part of a Son of God faith movement which had no central organization and no network of common doctrine and communication. A slow, patchy spread of the Gospel idea over succeeding decades makes sense, since it would be going against the established state of Christian belief (of the cultic Christ type) which did not have an historical Jesus.

III : A COMPOSITE CHRISTIANITY

It would be interesting to speculate on the life and personality of the man who put together the world's most influential book. But we have so little to go on. Compared to the later Gospels, Mark is a bare-bones effort. Flashes of insight, touches of literary genius catch our eye as we make our way through this the simplest and crudest account of Jesus' life and death. Yet there is hardly enough to get a sense of the writer behind it. By contrast, a portrait of Matthew offers much richer potential, even if the personality that emerges is not an endearing one. It would also be interesting to know how long Mark outlived his moment of creation. Was he around to see his symbolic character and story take on a life of their own? Might he have come in contact with men like Ignatius who insisted to his face that yes, there was a Jesus Christ born of Mary and crucified by Pilate? Would he have set them straight? Perhaps he even came to believe it himself.

Once the Gospel of Mark is approached from the viewpoint that this is a literary creation from start to finish, using the building blocks of the Galilean and Jerusalem Traditions, the pattern of the construction becomes evident. Part Nine will examine those Twin Traditions as used in Mark. Chapter 28 will survey the process of midrash, the role it played in creating the distinctive elements within the ministry of Jesus. Each and all will be identified as features of the kingdom community's own experience and practice: its ethical teachings and apocalyptic preaching, miracle traditions and controversies with the religious authorities, using scripture to fashion the details.

Chapter 29 will look at how the later evangelists have redacted Mark, altering that source to reflect their own agendas and theologies. It then turns to the second component of Mark's Gospel, the passion story, to show that in its broad outline it conforms to a recurring precedent found throughout centuries of Jewish writing: the tale known as the Suffering and Vindication of the Innocent Righteous One. This large scale overview passes to the fine detail of the trial and crucifixion scene, showing how so many pieces of it are taken directly from passages in the Psalms and Prophets. Through midrash, Mark cut out verses from here and there and installed them as ready-made details of his story. Other features and characters are invented plot devices to further the course of events.

Part Ten moves on to the 2nd century. How much do the Apostolic Fathers in their surviving writings know of the Gospels and their content? Very little, as chapter 30 will show. It will also examine Eusebius' report on the lost writings of bishop Papias, with his enigmatic references to "Mark" and "Matthew." Then on to a man who may have had more influence on Christianity's development than any other figure of the 2nd century: the gnostic 'heretic' Marcion. He

probably supplied the spur and the model for the Church's corpus of Paul's letters and the formation of the New Testament canon. Marcion's challenge also provoked a counter-response in the writing of the Acts of the Apostles, now acknowledged by much of critical scholarship to be largely if not entirely a fabricated picture of the Christian movement's beginnings to serve the purposes of the 2nd century Roman Church.

Finally, chapter 31 will turn to yet another manifestation of the diversity of Christianity in the first two centuries, in the writings of the Christian apologists of the 2nd century. In a fitting climax to the picture of the missing historical Jesus within the Christian documentary record itself, these defenses of the faith presented to the Greeks and Romans by the majority of those apologists will be shown to contain their own startling void on the human founder who was soon to conquer pagan society and send its ancient religious traditions into oblivion.

Part Nine

THE EVOLUTION OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

28

The Gospels as Midrash and Symbolism

Rewriting the Sacred Writings

Midrash. This key to unlocking the Gospels was uncovered less than half a century ago. The technique itself was known and understood in ancient Jewish writings for much longer than that, but the nature and extent of its application in the Gospels was not perceived until recently, perhaps because its implications were too threatening, too insidious. For the door this key unlocks leads not to a landscape of history but of fiction.

There have been many definitions of midrash, depending on what features or nuances one wishes to focus on. Traditional midrash was simply a process of drawing on elements from the scriptures to derive new or latent meanings from them. Often one passage was used to elucidate another, under the assumption that different elements of scripture were interconnected in the divine scheme of things. The object was to create new insights for new situations, perhaps which the original authors of scripture could not have envisioned—although, of course, the mind of God, which lay behind scripture, did—thus providing an open-ended process for generating guidance and understanding for the present and future.

But the techniques of midrash involved more than providing up-to-date elucidations on scripture in the service of moral and legal guidance and doctrinal clarification, which was the dominant form (Halakhah; relating to the Law) of rabbinic midrash. It also meant interpreting new situations in light of the old by casting the new in *terms* of the old. One of the most perceptive of modern scholars to elucidate midrash in the New Testament, as well as in the Old, has been the American Episcopal bishop, John Shelby Spong, although he has not carried his observations to their full and logical conclusion. In *Resurrection: Myth or Reality?* he illustrates a prime example of 'narrative' (Haggadah: relating to Jewish history) midrash as "the interpretation of a story or an event by relating it to another story or event in sacred history" (p.8). By way of example, he traces a recurring element in various Old Testament stories, beginning with Moses' parting of the Red Sea "to allow the Hebrew people to walk into God's

promised future," then through the telling of the story of Joshua who parted the waters of the Jordan River to allow the Hebrews to enter their future in the Promised Land, then through the same theme which appears in the story of Elijah (2 Kings 2:7-8) who also parts the Jordan waters, mimicked shortly afterward by Elijah's disciple Elisha. As Spong says (p.9): "The ability to part the waters told the Jewish people that Israel's history was one continuous story."

But before following Spong any further, one important consideration must be pointed out. The story of Moses was the original 'sacred scripture' in regard to the theme of parting the waters, but it was set down in writing only much later, perhaps preceded by an oral phase which embodied the legend of the Exodus and the parting of the Red Sea. Subsequent writers who crafted the story of Joshua (if that came later), and others still later who wrote of Elijah and Elisha, were also not recording the history of their own time. All these tales were composed centuries after the purported events, and there is virtually no way of telling how much, if anything, of these legends is rooted in an historical basis. Not only has archaeology failed to bear out a single aspect of the great Sojourn in Egypt and the Exodus story, virtually nothing of the alleged conquest of the Holy Land by Joshua is supportable. It is indeed impossible to verify the very existence of Moses and Joshua, and the situation is little if any better in regard to early figures of the monarchical period like Elijah and Elisha. So when biblical writers a few centuries later, some just before the Exile and some afterward, were crafting midrashic stories in Spong's 'parting of the waters' chain based on the most hallowed precedent of all, the newer parts of the chain were a crafting of new legend based on old legend, with no necessary historical basis to any of it. It could even be said that in having Elijah parting the waters, the writer may have been reflecting no historical tradition or legend whatever that such an event had occurred, but was simply creating that element of the story himself by drawing on the model in the stories of Moses and Joshua.

In other words, we cannot assume they were interpreting 'history' through the process of midrash. Rather, midrash allowed them to present a new story made more effective by incorporating elements of the old. It was not the new story itself which was necessarily intended to be factual, and certainly not in all its features, but only the significance behind it conjured up by those imposed associations. Thus some or all of it was only symbolically true, not literally true.

While not everything in Joshua and the Elijah-Elisha cycle can be determined to be midrash on previous stories, we do have an acknowledged example of a more or less entire biblical book, or books, constituting that very thing: 1 and 2 Chronicles are regarded as a type of midrash, a reworking of previous books, from 2 Samuel through 2 Kings, a retelling according to the interests of a later time. Here the author has recast that period of Israelite history in terms of his own, and his group's, understanding. This 'retelling of old traditions' was done, often with considerable leeway, for purposes that were devotional, educational, or simply for entertainment.

Following on his example of the recurring parting of the waters theme in the Old Testament, Spong continues it into the New Testament:

This same midrash tradition sought to tell the story of Jesus, who was believed by his followers to have both fulfilled and expanded the symbols of the Jewish tradition. The Gospel writers had Jesus begin his public career by walking into the waters of the Jordan River and parting, not the waters, but the heavens themselves so that the Spirit of God, which was linked with heaven and water in both Jewish mythology (Gen. 1:7) and in the Gospel traditions (John 7:39), could visibly descend, rest on, and validate Jesus as the new expression of God in the ongoing story of God's people, [p.9]

But if we were to bring Spong's observations to their ultimate conclusion, we would have to say that the latter part of that scene never happened. Mark himself created it whole cloth as a conscious mimicking of the 'parting of the waters' theme. And by applying the same principle, we might even be able to identify that the very baptism itself was midrash, and never happened. Ultimately, if the entire story of Jesus was a compilation of elements mimicking ancient figures, such as Moses, we might conclude that Jesus himself never happened, but was a creative re-characterization of old themes and traditions in a new setting.

Spong says, after his above quote, that this was an example of "bringing] the present into the sacred story." But what was that "present"? Did the present involve the life of a Jesus of Nazareth (we certainly could not find such a life in the epistles), or did it involve a faith movement which one creative author embodied in a representative story with a symbolic character? A story which was expanded by others and gradually came to be understood as actual history?

The writers of the book of Joshua, 1 and 2 Kings, and the later Chronicles would have had nothing to go on but previous writings or oral legends; they were considerably removed from the 'history' they told. But the New Testament evangelists should not have been in that position, even if they were a couple of generations past the events they supposedly recount. Memories and oral traditions should have a longer shelf life than that, especially regarding the Son of God living a recent life on earth. Midrash should not have been the sole process by which that life could have been described. Linking the experiences of Jesus of Nazareth with the motifs of sacred scripture is one thing, but such motifs would hardly have been the *only* thing. The force of actual memories about the man himself ("history remembered"), the oral traditions about his life which should have been circulating in the Christian air—with no logical reason for their abandonment let alone suppression—would inevitably have imposed themselves on any account. We can hardly imagine any evangelist, let alone the entire lot, consciously rejecting the incorporation of actual historical traditions into their Gospels, even if they did not always conform to more ancient counterparts; we can hardly imagine them deliberately restricting their sources to scriptural themes, stories and atomistically excised passages from the Jewish writings, no matter how sacred.

Again, what was that "present"? If the present is told in terms of the past, are those terms to be taken literally? This was also an age of allegory, of interpretation of texts in a fashion to make them represent something other than the literal reading (as in Philo, and even some pagan interpretation of Homer).

Turn over the coin, and we have texts *written* in a fashion not meant to be taken literally, but as symbolic of something else, something broader, less graphically representable. The Gospels then become the story of a movement, a new belief turned through midrash on sacred precedents into the allegorical tale of an individual teacher, prophet and savior. The movement itself becomes the embodiment of those sacred precedents, and as long as everyone understands what is going on, no harm is done. It is all an exercise in self-understanding.

Indeed, Spong goes on to penetrate to the heart of the matter:

The question to ask of this midrash tradition is not, Did it really happen?...The proper question of the midrash tradition is, What was the experience that led, or even compelled, the compilers of sacred tradition to include this moment, this life, or this event inside the interpretive framework of their sacred past? [p.9, 11]

In another book, *Liberating the Gospels*, Spong in discussing midrash puts it this way:

The Western mentality concentrates on an external world. It is a mentality anchored in time and space and objectivity. It always seeks to answer the historic questions: Is this real? Is this objectively true? Did this really happen? With these questions to guide us, the Western mind has always had trouble embracing the truth found in myth, legend, intuition, or poetry, [p. 18] ... I am no longer concerned about discovering whether certain biblical events actually occurred. I am far more interested in entering the experience that lies behind the description that found expression in the biblical text. I no longer ask, 'Did it really happen?' or, 'Is it true?' Rather, I ask, 'What does it mean? Why was this image chosen to convey this insight?' The Jewish originators of my gospel tradition, I now see, wrapped around their descriptions of Jesus' words and deeds the narratives of their own religious past. When they confronted what they believed was the presence of God in a contemporary moment, they interpreted this moment by applying to it similar moments in their sacred story when they were convinced the presence of God had also been real to their forebears in faith. They wrote, therefore, in the timelessness of valid religious experiences. So the Gospels were not descriptions of what happened or what Jesus said or did; they were interpretations of who Jesus was based on their ancient and sacred heritage, [p. 19-20]

But what Spong has failed to perceive is that if all we have is midrash from start to finish, we have no way of knowing where to draw the line between the literal and the symbolic. Is it before or after a Jesus of Nazareth? He asks, "What does it mean?" What does *what* mean? Are the evangelists interpreting an historical figure, known and remembered, in terms of Israel's sacred past, or are they interpreting their own movement, with Jesus merely a symbol as part of that interpretation? If Jesus of Nazareth cannot be found prior to or outside these Gospel creations, what are we to conclude is covered by the midrash? Spong speaks of "the truth found in myth, legend, intuition, or poetry." Where myth is

concerned, it is usually assumed by mycologists that the myth in its entirety is fictional. The myth of Adam and Even, for any but the fundamentalist mentality, is often interpreted as symbolizing the dawning of the consciousness of good and evil in the evolving human mind, but Adam and Eve are themselves mythical, not real individuals around whom a myth was constructed. Spong's retention of an historical Jesus in his ancient confrontation of "what they believed was the presence of God in a contemporary moment" is no more supportable than the reality of Paul Bunyan or an historical Heracles, because there is no "history remembered" in the Gospels, and virtually nothing but strong evidence to the contrary in the non-Gospel writings of the early Christ cult.

Jesus and John F. Kennedy

Spong's rescue effort also fails to take into account more realistic considerations. Let's try to illustrate the problem in the alleged role of midrash in the Gospels by this analogy. It is as if someone set about to write a biography of John F. Kennedy and had fashioned a story which was put together with elements of the life of Theodore Roosevelt, each incident of Kennedy's alleged life being a reworking of an event in Roosevelt's life. If Kennedy were portrayed as taking part in World War II, leading a charge up some hill on Guadalcanal in exactly the same terms and details as biographical reports of Roosevelt's charge up the hill of San Juan in Cuba in the Spanish-American War of 1898, so that we could tell the Kennedy incident had been fashioned directly from reports relating to Roosevelt, we could not say, without independent corroboration, that Kennedy had ever undergone such an experience. (In actual fact, he did not.) If every single incident in Kennedy's alleged biography were similarly identified as fashioned out of Roosevelt's career—and those of other older Presidents—could we say that this was a biography at all, that it had any factual relationship to Kennedy's life experiences? And if we had no contemporary corroborative reports on the very fact of an individual named John F. Kennedy who was President of the United States, could we be sure from this sort of 'biography' that such a man and President had existed at all?

We happen to know that John F. Kennedy *was* in World War II, and we know of some of his exploits, particularly the incident when he was the commanding Lieutenant of PT Boat 109. In that dramatic sinking of his ship in August of 1943 in the Solomon Islands, he distinguished himself with exceptional bravery and leadership, something well worth recording on its own terms. It would be a matter of great puzzlement to us if a biography of Kennedy did not include this incident, or if it was 'described' in terms that were identical or near-identical to some past naval exploit undergone by some other figure, so that we could not distinguish any specific connection of it to John F. Kennedy. And we would be exceedingly puzzled if virtually every event of the biography of Kennedy could similarly not be distinguished as having any historical connection with him. 'Explanations' that so much respect for previous Presidents was in vogue that everything to do with Kennedy had to be presented in terms of those previous Presidents would hardly satisfy us, or make sense of the total absence of anything specific to Kennedy himself, any "history remembered" for him.

Yet this is exactly the situation we face in regard to the Jesus of the Gospels for his "biography" is entirely made up of midrashic creations derived from the Hebrew bible, with nothing that can be identified—beyond known historical characters and settings which provide the story's background—as factual, as a "history remembered." Such a situation would defy all logic and human instinct if such a writing were purported to be the biography of an actual historical character who had made such an impact that he was turned into a part of the Godhead.

How are we to explain such an impact if no life experiences were worthy enough to be recorded? How does one preach such a man, how recount the story of a life meriting deification and a redemptive role if he is dressed up in nothing but scriptural garb? On the other hand, it would make much better sense if this character and his story were simply symbolic, if he were someone who had not lived an actual life that could have contributed its own details and traditions to the formation of a story about him. The 'explanation' that nothing of an historical nature was known about this nevertheless historical figure, thus requiring an invention based on scripture, does not help, let alone make sense in itself, since we would have to question how such a figure about whom nothing was preserved could possibly have had the effect he allegedly had, and could possibly have been preached and accepted by countless others.

While it has been a quarter century or so since the pervasive midrashic content of the Passion portion of the Gospels was recognized, the realization was slower in coming that virtually everything else in the pre-passion part of Mark's Gospel was likewise pulled from scripture and other ancient literature and myth. As we shall see, nothing here represents history, remembered scenes of Jesus' own activities. If there were any such memories, there would have been no need to cast everything in terms of scriptural precedent. Even if there were a desire to relate Jesus' ministry to certain hallowed Jewish mythology, it would have been impossible to exclude all elements of actual history at the same time. It is only in the absence of *any* historical traditions about Jesus to draw on (a situation that would make no sense in the context of an historical figure) that such exclusive use of scripture to create the Gospel story would feasibly come about.

Is Spong willing to let *both* the story *and* its central character "mean," as he puts it, "the presence of God in a contemporary moment"? Instead of those Jewish originators of the gospel tradition "wrapping around their descriptions of Jesus' words and deeds the narratives of their own religious past," does the total picture of the evidence not suggest that those originators wrapped the character of Jesus himself, set within midrashic mirrors of their religious past, around their *own* sectarian activities and perceptions of God working in the present through *themselves*? Jesus' words and deeds entirely reside within the midrashic content; there is no independent evidence of their existence as proceeding from him. Teachings similar to those of Jesus in the Gospels are found throughout the early record with no attribution to him. Even in Q they are evidently not linked to him in the earlier strata. The literary events of the Gospels cannot be found before the Gospels, except as divorced from any historical setting in the mere 'fact' of a death and resurrection. But "the presence of God in a contemporary moment,"

operating in the mid to late 1st century as a prelude to the End-time, could be illustrated through allegorical midrash, presenting and authenticating the new movement as part of God's ongoing yet timeless involvement in the process of salvation. As such, this would conform entirely to Spong's theory of midrash and its purpose.

Jesus as Symbol

Q and Mark, along with the later Gospels, are instructional documents, aimed primarily at the sect itself, only secondarily at the outside world. The personality of Mark's Jesus, as Arnal has admitted, is indistinguishable from that of the community prophets. He represents the sect's understanding of itself, idealized and heroicized, much as Heracles mythologizes the Mycenaean hero, or Achilles the Greek warrior. Indeed, in Q any personality of Jesus, let alone a biography, is so undeveloped it becomes natural to suspect that he was only a symbolic 'character' deliberately introduced into the document in the course of its evolution to provide a focus, a character that may not have been envisioned as historical. Jesus, whether in Q or Mark, serves as a symbol around which the sectarian and instructional message is built. Such messages are best impressed on the recipient in personal stories involving an individual; he serves better as a motivator and exemplar than does an abstract directive. Even the miracles and controversy stories, originally identified with the community, would inevitably have benefited by being focused on a representative individual, since in that way they could be dramatized and glorified, brought home in a more personal way.

In Mark, is Jesus still only a symbol, or has he graduated to an envisioned historical figure? It almost makes no difference. There can be no question that the Gospel story itself is symbolic, not intended as an *actual* biography. It has been constructed out of scripture to fit the needs of the day (late 1st century), not Jesus' day, which is why it contains so many anachronisms. It is generally agreed, for example, that there is no evidence for synagogues (in which Jesus is regularly said to preach) in Galilee forty years prior to the Jewish War, nor much of a Pharisee presence there (as noted earlier). Both are the mark of the post-70 dispersion following the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple. Issues and controversies relating to "the disciples" are a retrojection of criticism and disputes surrounding the later church, especially when it had expanded to encompass gentile areas and membership.¹⁴⁹

Let us now trace the use of midrash and symbolism in the Gospel of Mark.

Preparing for a Ministry in Galilee

The statement of Jesus' purpose, his mission in regard to his ministry on earth, is given very simply in Mark 1:14-15:

After John had been arrested, Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the Gospel of God: "The time has come, the kingdom of God is upon you; repent, and believe the Gospel."

Simple—almost mundane. A declaration like this could apply to almost any kingdom preaching group one could envision plying its message across the land

of Palestine and beyond during the 1st century. We can hear those words in the mouths of a multitude of prophets who believed that a time of judgment and transformation of the world—the long-awaited Day of the Lord—was imminent. Such a declaration would have been right at home in the Q community.

Mark has prefaced this statement with some preparatory material. At the head of his Gospel he presents John the Baptist, who misquotes a compound quotation from Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3 about a voice crying in the wilderness to prepare a way for the Lord. John arrives to preach repentance, a standard practice in announcing the imminence of the kingdom. But he is also a "herald." During centuries of expectation of the Day of the Lord, the moment when God himself would come to restore Israel to her former greatness and more, certain accompanying pieces of mythology had developed. One was that God's arrival would be preceded by the appearance of the prophet Elijah. In Malachi 4:5 this herald is specifically stated to *be* Elijah, and although the herald in Isaiah 40:3 refers only to an angelic messenger, Christians understood it to mean Elijah as well. Thus John the Baptist has become a stand-in for this expected precursor, since any group claiming that the kingdom was about to arrive had to be able to point to an Elijah-type figure to fulfill the scriptural expectation.

John's quotation from the prophets and Mark's description of him is followed by a quote from the Baptist (1:7-8) which also appears in Q, an example of Mark's knowledge and use of some Q traditions: John's declaration that, "After me comes one who is mightier than I. I am not fit to unfasten his shoes. I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

The reader may remember that this passage in Q (3:16-17) ran a little longer and included some further description of the one to come, something a little more horrific. There, the one John heralded was due to baptize with fire. He would separate the wheat from the chaff, and the latter would burn in everlasting flames. John's prophecy in Q was almost certainly about the Son of Man, the End-time judge derived from Daniel 7. If John had ever said anything like this, he was probably referring to the arrival of God himself on the Day of the Lord.

Mark brings this evolution of John's prophesying (from God to the Son of Man) a step further. Q's language shows that John was not prophesying a Jesus, preacher of the kingdom and founder of the community, who in any case cannot be discovered in early Q. But in Mark, as in a later stage of Q, this founder is now on the scene and John has become *his* herald. Thus, Mark has decided (if he is familiar with the longer tradition found in Q) that all the references to the baptism of fire and the winnowing of the wheat from the chaff would have to be dropped. They would be unsuitable to his own fully-developed Jesus.

This scene of John the Baptist's preaching, in Mark 1:2-8, cannot be regarded as in any way historical, since we can identify the successive stages through which it has evolved, from John possibly prophesying God, to Q2 making it a prophecy of the Son of Man, to Mark's turning it into a prophecy of Jesus himself. Such an evolution moves in lockstep with the community's view of itself, first as one awaiting the Son of Man, without a preaching Jesus, ultimately to late Q and Mark who portray John as the herald of Jesus who himself becomes the Son of Man.

After the scene of John preaching, Jesus arrives and is baptized in the Jordan river by John. Two things happen. One is a graphic representation of the idea that the coming one will baptize with the Holy Spirit, for that investment of the Spirit—an effect of Christian baptism also envisioned by Paul—is symbolized by Mark as the opening of the heavens and the descent of the Holy Spirit into Jesus in the form of a dove. This first element was seen by Spong as re-echoing the theme of the parting of the waters throughout the Jewish scriptures. This is followed by words out of heaven spoken by God. "Thou art my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." This is a melding of two verses from scripture: Isaiah 42:1, "Here is my servant (child/son), whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights," and Psalm 2:7, "You are my Son, this day I become your father." Mark represents this by having God himself declare Jesus to be his "Son." There are also echoes of this scene of John and Jesus in the transfer of authority between Elijah and Elisha in 1 Kings 2.

The baptismal scene, therefore, is not based on any historical incident. This is corroborated by the fact that no epistle writer ever refers to the baptism of Jesus, not even Paul who would have had good reason to appeal to its Markan elements in support of his own mystical view of "baptism in Christ." Rather, the scene is Mark's construction out of scripture. In it can be seen a common technique in midrash, combining two or more separate scriptural passages that were regarded as complementary and as strengthening each other, like two components of a manufactured alloy. We can assume the Markan community possessed such a rite, otherwise Mark would have had no interest in portraying Jesus as being baptized, especially as it had inherent difficulties.

The baptismal scene is followed by the Temptation story, but in Mark this is so truncated that very little meaning can be drawn from it. But when we turn to Q as presented in Matthew and Luke, the purpose of the episode emerges.

These three temptations of Jesus by the devil—to turn stones into bread so as to eat after fasting, to throw himself off the Temple's parapet and demonstrate that God will protect him, to bow down before Satan and receive dominion over the world—these serve to make moral points which relate to the community's concerns. How they are specifically to be interpreted has been a matter of debate. Don't be anxious over worldly needs, don't worry about death, don't aspire to political power or revolt, is one type of interpretation.¹⁵⁰ The point is that this set of temptations faced by Jesus symbolizes the ones which the community members themselves face. Jesus' response, as fashioned by Q and its redactors Matthew and Luke, represents the attitudes which need to be adopted in order to neutralize those temptations. Jesus thus serves as a model for the community, to represent their ideal mode of behavior.

Once again, some of the building blocks of this 'morality tale' are drawn from scripture: the three temptations are based on the three trials of the Israelites during their wanderings in Sinai; there are quotations from Deuteronomy and the Psalms. In midrashic fashion, different scriptural passages are brought together to illuminate the point the formulator of this composite lesson wishes to make. The figure of Jesus can be entirely fictional, yet still serve to symbolize and teach the audience. Whether Mark felt he was conveying the moral entailed in

the Q tradition by his drastically reduced reference to Jesus' temptation (based on a deficient memory of a Q tradition?) might be difficult to say.

In this one little preparatory sequence, then, we can see Mark constructing, out of precedents which he has altered and brought to new levels of meaning, an artificial picture which symbolizes various elements of the kingdom community. These are the expectation based on scriptural promises, popular mythology as in the anticipation of Elijah, the deeper significance of the community's rite of baptism, the difficulties and temptations it faced. All of it is focused on a single figure representing the community as a whole.

New Testament Methodology

Thus it would appear that the traditional ways of analyzing the elements of the Gospels have been unfounded. The standard approach has always been to attempt to identify what features of a given incident might be traceable to Jesus, to discover what authentic elements might lie at the origin of a tradition about him. Scholarship has sought to uncover evidence of how the preservers of such an incident might have altered it, how it was passed on through oral tradition and the changes which could be wrought in the process, and finally, how the Gospel writers might have reworked such a received unit of tradition for their own purposes. These matters are referred to by such terms as source criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, and so on.

It would seem that none of it is based in reality. Not only have we seen that the epistles are resoundingly silent on traditions to do with Jesus' ministry, even in their barest fundamentals, we can see the process of Mark reworking traditions that had, in their previous incarnations, nothing to do with an historical Jesus or historical events. (That process is particularly clear in the assigning to Jesus of teachings which in earlier writings are not attributed to him.)

In other words, the whole idea of traditions originating with Jesus or in the immediate circles of response to him, subsequently to travel through oral transmission to the desks of the evangelists, has no support in the evidence. Instead, we see *literary* construction and reworking. We see creativity by the evangelist himself, usually applying something to Jesus—whether from scripture or earlier phases of the material—which had nothing to do with him. Jesus comes to life on the writing desk of Mark, or occasionally in rudimentary form at the hands of the later Q redactors who have constructed a few little anecdotes for him out of earlier pieces of material which had stood on their own. When one looks behind the Gospel curtain, the mosaic of Jesus of Nazareth very quickly disintegrates into component pieces and unrecognizable antecedents.

This is not to say that one cannot trace an individual element's history of evolution and reworking, to arrive at some original basic form. This has been a mainstay of New Testament study for generations. But an unargued assumption has also been applied: that those anterior processes lead one back through a chain which begins in many cases with Jesus himself, passing through the usage of the early church, eventually to reach the evangelists in their time. Such study has assumed that early Christian traditions were founded on a force located at ground zero, generated out of the figure of Jesus and the various responses to

him. That force was seen as then expanding outward in a Big Bang which saw their independent molecules of tradition take on new shapes and meanings, at times attracting external molecules from other non-Jesus spheres, drawn into the Jesus gravitational field.

This, too, has no basis in reality. All those constituent pieces came instead from variegated sources floating about in the atmosphere of the time. They came from the diffuse antecedents to Mark's own community, the wider scene of which his group was a part, as well as from the many-faceted sectarian impulses directed at reforming the faith, ethics and social conditions of the period. They came from the widespread expectation of God's kingdom, the hope of centuries.

As we saw in regard to Q1, they might even come from outside expressions, non-Jewish sources like that of the Cynics. But the focal point of all this material lay not in some common beginning or single figure of origin, it occurred at a later stage, when gravitational forces were increasingly pulling these disparate elements together. To some degree, that process took place in later Q, but it was Mark who brought it to completion as an extension of the Q impulse.

Jesus as Prophet

In Mark, as in Q, Jesus is an apocalyptic prophet. He warns about the imminent End-time and what will happen when it arrives. This was a time of prophets, as Josephus reveals, and as John the Baptist represents.

In Mark and Q, Jesus speaks in a prophetic style going back to the biblical prophets, emulated by the Q community. Declamations are prefaced by "Truly I say to you," (as in Mark 3:28). In Q, Jesus' denunciations of the Pharisees and others are launched with "Woe to you," a phrase found in Isaiah 5:8-24. Mark himself does not have specific "woe" sayings, although in 7:6 he condemns the Pharisees as "hypocrites," drawing on a quotation from Isaiah.

A major element in the illustrious prophet's career is the recruitment of followers. Mark's phrase, "I will make you fishers of men," is poetically memorable, but the scene of Jesus collecting his first disciples (1:16-20) is drawn from Elijah's recruitment of Elisha in 1 Kings 19:19-21. Simon and Andrew are fishing with their nets when Jesus passes by; Elisha is ploughing with his oxen when Elijah passes by and throws his cloak over him as a summons. James and John are summoned by Jesus too, and they follow him after taking leave of their father Zebedee and his hired men; Elisha follows Elijah after first "kissing my father and mother." When recasting a scriptural passage, every detail need not be identical, as long as the basic elements and spirit of the scene are captured and remain identifiable, even if at an unconscious level, to the reader or listener. The new setting merges with the old to anchor and illuminate present reality in the light of the sacred past.

The Nature of the Kingdom

Similarly, Mark's Jesus preaches the kingdom. He gives his audience an insight into what the kingdom will be like and what processes are leading to its emergence. But we need to highlight a curious observation about that preaching. In both the Gospels and Q, expectations of the future are expressed in two quite

different ways. One is blatantly apocalyptic. The Son of Man will arrive and wreak havoc on the world. Mark's Little Apocalypse in chapter 13 details the "birthpangs of the new age" (13:8): war, earthquake, famines. The Son of Man is coming at a time no one knows, but be ready for him! There will be darkened sun and moon, falling stars. The prophets preaching this kind of kingdom must have made their listeners tremble—or scoff.

Beside those fulminations stands an entirely different expression of the kingdom. Most of this latter atmosphere is found in the parables. Here, as in the three parables of Mark 4, are images of quiet growth, seeds blossoming into plants and fruitful harvest. The seed is the word of preaching about the kingdom, the yield is the spread of the idea and its acceptance among many people. The kingdom becomes a tree on which birds may settle for shade.¹⁵¹

In Q, a famous parable (Lk./Q 14:16-24) describes how those first invited to God's banquet, including the rich and privileged, have refused to come, and the master of the house has replaced them with the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame. Not only does this epitomize the counter-culture nature of the Q movement and the expected reversal of fortune from society's present imbalance, it represents a kingdom in which joy and plenty are to be the lot of the previously unfortunate—now the new elect—a promise made in sayings like the Beatitudes.

Indeed, the two pictures of the future appear incompatible. It is difficult to impute them to the preaching of a single man. Yet Q, followed by Mark and the other Synoptics, have brought them together under the same roof, seemingly impervious to the contradictions.

It seems impossible to reconcile the parables' picture of the kingdom with the apocalyptic one involving the Son of Man. In the former there is no mention of cataclysmic upheaval, no hint of the dread judge expected at the End-time. In Mark's apocalypse, rich and poor alike have much to fear and run from. In Q's picture (Lk./Q 17:34-5) there will be two in a bed, one will die. Two women will be grinding corn, one will be taken. Any suggestion that it is the evil one of the two who will suffer such a fate is not expressed. On the other hand, the kingdom of the parables seems to arrive peaceably. There is even the implication that simply through the preaching movement itself, with a bit of cooperation from all concerned, the kingdom is already at hand.

This dichotomy of portrayal has led to generations of seesaw interpretation and debate about the precise nature of Jesus' concept of the kingdom. Was Jesus a thundering apocalyptic prophet, fixated on the coming end of the world in fire at the hands of the Son of Man? Or was he a calmer, more inward-looking seer who had no interest in apocalyptic images and imagined that the right people acting in the right ways could bring about an enlightened kingdom of God on earth—even now?

Of course, he was both and he was neither. These two disparate views of the coming kingdom were adopted by the Q community and by extension the Markan one. Through the imputation of both outlooks to an invented founder at the Q3 level, and to the composite Jesus of Nazareth in Mark's Gospel, both became attached to that artificial individual, one who served to symbolize all the varied expressions of the two communities.

Ultimately, the two outlooks go back to those two incompatible components of early Q, the enlightened wisdom sayings of Q1 and the apocalyptic orientation of Q2. Once again we can see that the two are products of distinct sources which have been brought together in a marriage of incompatibility. The nature of the Q preaching sect was basically that of Q2, and was no doubt that way from the beginning. The sentiments of Q1 represent an external tradition, a harking back to the philosophy and practice of the Cynics. That tradition was adopted by the apocalyptic community in Galilee for reasons which can only be speculative. But come together they did, eventually to find their way into one literary mouth.

The Son of Man

There can be little doubt that the Son of Man figure is ultimately derived from Daniel 7:13-14:

I was still watching in the visions of the night and I saw one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven; he approached the Ancient of Years [God] and was presented to him. Sovereignty and glory and kingly power were given to him, so that all people and nations of every language should serve him; his sovereignty was to be an everlasting sovereignty which should not pass away, and his kingly power such as should never be impaired.

This "one like a son of man" is identified in 7:27:

The kingly power, sovereignty, and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High. Their kingly power is an everlasting power and all sovereignties shall serve them and obey them.

At least by the middle of the 1st century CE (we can find no evidence before that), certain sectarian circles were personifying this "one like a son of man" as a divine figure who would appear at the End-time. Scholars have long debated whether this was a widespread, unified concept in Jewish thought around the supposed time of Jesus. Most recent consensus has judged that it was not; rather, a lot of independent circles used the imagery of Daniel 7 to develop a diversity of messianic-type prediction involving a "one like a son of man," and that all of it was ultimately drawn from exegesis on Daniel 7. (See *The Son of Man Debate: A History and Evaluation*, by Delbert Burkett, p. 73-76.)

All the essential elements of the future apocalyptic Son of Man in Mark (proceeding from the previous Q ethos) can be identified in Daniel. The "coming on the clouds of heaven" has been turned from a description of the approach to God ("I saw one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven; he approached the Ancient of Years...") to the Son of Man's coming to earth: "And they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with power and glory" (Mk. 13:26; cf. 14:62, 8:38). The 'power' and 'glory' motifs have been taken from Daniel 7:14 and 27. The idea of 'judging,' developed to an extreme degree by Matthew (25:31f), along with sitting on a throne at the right hand of God, is inherent in that 'kingly power.'

Mark, and Q before him, have envisioned their Son of Man out of scripture. It would seem not to have derived from any preaching of Jesus himself, for the

extant body of early Christian writing outside the Gospels and Acts provides no mention of the Son of Man, whether applied to Jesus or not. (Revelation is the exception, as noted before, but here the term is used in its pure Danielic form, with no titled association with the document's Jesus.) Considering Paul's and others' focus on the arrival of their Christ at the End-time, this is a major silence and indicates that the concept did not circulate in those circles. Paul does allude to a couple of the motifs elsewhere associated with the Son of Man, notably in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17, but here the "clouds" are what still-living Christians will be "caught up in" to meet the Lord in the air (the main source of the modern evangelical expectation of the "Rapture"), and the general concept in the epistles of Christ "coming" and his kingly power are general enough to make doubtful any direct derivation from Daniel. Finally, we should note once again that in Q, when Jesus is speaking of the Son of Man, he sounds as though he is referring to a figure other than himself, indicating that the Son of Man concept arrived in Q before Jesus did.

Propheying the Future

The most famous and significant prophetic passage in the Gospels is the Little Apocalypse of Mark 13, copied closely by Matthew and Luke. In it, Jesus prophesies to his disciples that the Temple they are marveling at (a transparent set-up device) will be utterly thrown down, that an "abomination of desolation" will be set up (though not in its place, as concluded earlier), and this will be the prelude to the woes and catastrophes which shall herald the End, at which the Son of Man will come on the clouds. Whether some previous piece of Jewish apocalyptic writing was a source of inspiration for Mark is debated, but the scene as it stands was fashioned by Mark entirely out of scriptural pieces and cannot be regarded as a remembered pronouncement by Jesus.

As we have seen, the 'prophetic pattern' of the scene was the device of classic apocalypses like the Book of Daniel: the author adopts the name and time of a prophetic figure of the past, who then correctly 'prophesies' the events that have actually taken place since then, to persuade the reader that the additional prophecies which still lie in the real future can be trusted. Here the latter are Mark's prophecies not only about the "abomination" but the catastrophic events of nature and the arrival of the Son of Man at the near-imminent End-time. Mark even goes out on a limb and has his Jesus say that "the present generation will live to see it all"—but not *too* far out, for he does not venture an exact prophecy: "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, not even the Son, only the Father." The Son Jesus (and of course Mark himself) is absolved of the responsibility of revealing anything more specific.

In any case, the scene is a pastiche from scripture. Price has itemized the correspondences, but let's lay the texts out for comparison (using the RSV):

Mark 13:7 - introduces the concept of divine revelation about things which must happen before the End-time arrives.

Daniel 2:25-29 - Daniel tells King Nebuchadnezzar that God reveals the mysteries about "what will be in the latter days" and "what is to be."

Mark 13:8 - "For nation will rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom."

Isaiah 19:2 - "And I will stir up Egyptian against Egyptian, and they will fight, every man against his brother and every man against his neighbor, city against city, kingdom against kingdom." And,

2 Chronicles 15:6 - "...nation against nation, and city against city."

Mark 13:12 - "Brother will deliver up brother to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death."

Micah 7:6 - "for the son treats the father with contempt, the daughter rises up against her mother... a man's enemies are the men of his own house."

Mark 13:14 - "But when you see 'the abomination of desolation' set up where it ought not to be..."

Daniel 9:27 - "and upon the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate..."

Mark 13:19 - "For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never will be."

Daniel 12:1 - "And there shall be a time of trouble such as never has been till that time..."

Mark 13:21 - "And if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it. False Christs and false prophets will arise and show signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But take heed; I have told you all things beforehand."

Deut. 13:1 - "If a prophet arises among you, or a dreamer of dreams, and gives you a sign or a wonder...you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or to that dreamer of dreams; for the Lord your God is testing you..."

Mark 13:24 - "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken."

Isaiah 13:10 - For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light, and the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light.¹⁵²

Mark 13:26 - "And then they will see the Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory."

Daniel 7:13-14 - and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man... and to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom....

Mark 13:27 - "Then he will send out his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of earth and the ends of heaven."

Deut. 30:4 - If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there he will fetch you.

Between these midrashic passages, Mark has Jesus forecast some of the conditions that we can presume were currently found in the Markan community: being handed over to the courts and being flogged in the synagogues, hated by all for one's beliefs; readers are given directions about how to act if arrested,

along with advice about what to do and what not to do when the End approaches (signaled by the 'abomination of desolation'). Keep alert, keep awake.

Is one to believe that Jesus recited or reworked this pastiche of selections from scripture to enlighten his audience about the future? Or that oral tradition could preserve such literary details over the decades before Mark? Or is it more likely that Mark, sitting at his writing desk with his copy of the Hebrew bible open before him, simply put the whole thing together from scratch, words of holy scripture sounding through the mouth of his Jesus of Nazareth symbolizing the preaching message of his sect about the coming apocalypse?

Jesus as Reformer

The Q and Markan communities belonged to a sectarian movement. As such they were in conflict with the establishment and its elitist expressions, the prerogatives and privileges it assumed for itself. A counter-cultural movement is usually universalist in its ideals. Those ideals state that everything is open to the common man and woman, and no one can claim an exclusive pipeline to authority or to the Deity.

Some of what Mark imputes to Jesus relates to concerns of the community and the new reforms it champions. Jesus says to the paralyzed man (2:5): "My son, your sins are forgiven," and the lawyers respond: "This is blasphemy! Who but God alone can forgive sins?" "God," of course, refers to the self-appointed representatives of God, namely the religious establishment, who thus control the access to, and the cost of, such forgiveness.

Clearly, the Markan community has rejected that exclusivity. It claims the right for itself to seek God's forgiveness for sins. It is also rebelling against Sabbath strictures as imposed by the Pharisees. These regulations, too, are to be bent, perhaps even broken under some circumstances. "The Sabbath was made for the sake of man and not man for the Sabbath" (2:27). Human interests, even on the Sabbath, should come before rigid rules and the elitist proscriptions of the establishment. Thus Jesus heals on the Sabbath (3:1-6), regarding the saving of life and limb to be of overriding importance. The fact that this incident is portrayed by Mark as instigating the Pharisees' plot to do away with Jesus shows that such new attitudes on the part of the kingdom movement must have seemed disturbing and revolutionary to the religious authorities and posed a great threat.

Evidently, that movement did not indulge much in fasting (Mark 2:18) or punishment of the body. The little parable in the Dialogue between Jesus and John has been used to illustrate a situation in which the founder (perhaps merely as "a son of man") came eating and drinking. This undoubtedly epitomizes the community itself. That community is far from elitist, far from turning up its nose at the less fortunate and 'sanitized' members of society. Mark 2:15-17 reveals a Jesus who eats with "tax-gatherers and sinners." Not only does the Markan community welcome all, it purposely invites those who are looked down on, and those who are "sick" (2:17). The practice of table fellowship with anyone who wishes to join is a mark of their new freedom and liberality. This community has rejected the purity regulations which all too often serve to ostracize those who are unable to meet the stringent requirements of being "clean." Eating with the

"impure" is a mark of that rejection. Not washing one's hands before eating—a ritual purity regulation rather than a hygienic one—is a gesture of rejection of the whole elitist ethos. Even traditionally "impure" foods are declared to be clean (7:14-23).

Rather than regard all these reform impulses as the product of a single man, who as a lone individual would have had difficulty in promoting and bringing about such a revolution in behavior and outlook, one ought to recognize them as the expression of the movement itself. They are part of the anticipation of the kingdom with its egalitarian promise and expectation of reversal, in which the exalted shall be humbled and the humble exalted. The Markan Jesus of Nazareth, like his forerunner in the Q founder, symbolizes in his own teaching the reform mindset of the entire kingdom movement.

Jesus and the Authorities

Those reform impulses inevitably led to controversy with the authorities, preserved in both Q and the Gospels as little exchanges between Jesus and members of the establishment. Such people are an ever-present force in Jesus' entourage. He is constantly surrounded by a coterie of scribes, Pharisees, lawyers and elders, who—seemingly not having anything better to do—follow him about to challenge and threaten him, express their dismay at everything he says and does, and bear the brunt of his condemnation. These little exchanges are called "controversy stories," and they have no doubt crystallized out of countless experiences on the part of the community preachers in one situation or another, in which opposition to their beliefs and practices has been expressed. In later Q and the Gospels they are focused on the figure of Jesus.

A prominent controversy story found in both Mark and Q is the Beelzebul exchange (Mk. 3:22-26):

The doctors of the law, too, who had come down from Jerusalem, said, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "He drives out devils by the prince of devils." So he called them to come forward, and spoke to them in parables; "How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand; if a household is divided against itself, that house will never stand; and if Satan is in rebellion against himself, he is divided and cannot stand; and that is the end of him." [NEB]

An accusation has been made against prophets of the community who are claiming to exorcise demons from people, and this is their response. When accused of driving out demons by calling up the power of the prince of demons (Satan/Beelzebul), the Q and Markan prophets counter that this makes no sense. If Satan allowed himself to be used to act against his fellow demons, they argue, the power of his own kingdom would be divided against itself and would collapse. The words of Jesus serve to epitomize this argument with the religious establishment concerning a chief activity of the kingdom preachers.

Yet even here, midrash is employed in the creation of scenes of such controversies. Price (*op cit.*, p.11) points out that in 7:6, amid the controversy over the washing of hands before eating and the issue of clean and unclean

foods, Jesus quotes Isaiah 29:13. But, as an example of an anomaly that arises frequently throughout the Synoptics, Jesus does not quote the Hebrew text of this Isaiah verse but that of the Greek Septuagint. It is generally thought that an Aramaic-speaking Jesus would not have appealed to the Greek text. However, the Hebrew would not have served his purpose here, for it merely spoke of 'men's fear of God' being something they have learned by rote commandment of men, whereas Jesus in controversy with the scribes in Mark 7 wants to make the point that, rather than teaching the commandments of God (as the reform-minded sect sees them), the Pharisees are teaching their own ultra-restrictive tenets and traditions, which is not what God wants. (Here, too, is the mark of the sectarian mentality: that the religious establishment has it all wrong, blind to the truth which the sect itself sees or to whom it has been revealed.) The Septuagint version of Isaiah 29:13, when translated from the Hebrew, broadened the idea of "teaching" to encompass more than just the fear of God. Thus, this exchange could not have proceeded from any tradition rooted in an experience of Jesus but reflects Mark's use of his version of scripture (the Greek one) to create a scene for Jesus which would make the Markan sect's point. Spoken in the mouth of a glorified representative of the sect, such telling arguments and pronouncements in support of the new view have a force and impact on the reader they would not otherwise convey.

Jesus as Miracle Worker

Mark has been called "a Gospel of miracles." Unlike his paucity of sayings in comparison to the others, his miracles are overflowing, and have supplied the bulk of the miracles 'reported' by the later evangelists. It is safe to say that every one of them is midrashically derived or inspired from elements of scripture. Their basic purpose is to legitimize and authenticate the divine authority and truth in the sect's message, through its symbolic representative Jesus.

One of the expected signs that the Day of the Lord stood at hand was the performance of miracles. Most important, God would confer upon men the power to heal sickness and physical disorders, including those caused by evil spirits. That expectation went back to passages such as those seen in Isaiah:

The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy (35:5). [This healing would extend even to the resurrection of the dead:] But thy dead live, their bodies will rise again. They that sleep in the earth will awake and shout for joy. (26:19)

That healings of all sorts were part and parcel of the community's prophetic activity is shown by Mark's mission statement in 6:7-13:

.. he summoned the Twelve and sent them out in pairs on a mission. He gave them authority over unclean spirits... They drove out many devils, and many sick people they anointed with oil and cured.

In Q's dialogue between Jesus and John, Jesus is asked by John's disciples if he is the coming one. As demonstrated in chapter 25, this passage is an artificial construction belonging to a later stratum. The original question was probably put

to the Q community, asking whether the kingdom was truly about to arrive. The answer given by the Q prophets is placed in Jesus' mouth (Mt. 11:4-5) and its focus is upon miracles. In fact, it is virtually a recitation of the above passages from Isaiah:

Jesus answered: "Go and tell John what you have seen: the blind recover their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are clean, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, the poor are hearing the good news."

One wonders if the Q and Markan prophets actually claimed to raise anyone from the dead. It is possible that there were claims of that sort, although Mark's portrayal may be based on expectation of prophetic fulfillment. Yet Acts (9:36-43) has Peter raising the woman Tabitha from death, and even Paul raises a boy from the point of seeming dead (20:7-12). Acts as a whole is full of healing miracles by both Peter and Paul, indicating that this was the claimed practice and expectation of the age.

Mark's first miracle is an exorcism (1:21-28), the most significant type of healing in the Gospels. One of the great superstitions of the age—one which Mark's Jesus is unable to rise above—was the pervasive belief in demons, the presence of evil spirits in the very air in which people moved. These demons were regarded as responsible for many types of illness, both physical and mental. They were held accountable as well for almost any unfortunate accident or natural disaster, even for developments within society which certain groups regarded as counter to God's truth and wishes. (Consider the Church Fathers' belief that demons had orchestrated ahead of time the false rites of the mysteries to mimic the Christians' own.)

One of the attendant benefits of the kingdom would be the suppression, if not the complete destruction of all these harmful, hostile spirits. Exorcising demons from sick people was a sign that this overthrow of evil forces was imminent, and that the prophet-exorcist was indeed speaking and acting on behalf of God. The Beelzebub controversy, first formulated at the Q2 level, shows that the community practiced exorcism. Jesus symbolizes this activity.

In this respect, little could be drawn from the Jewish scriptures, since in that earlier period there was no conception of the role of evil spirits in such things, and no practice of exorcism; this was to enter Jewish thought under Persian and Greek influence.¹⁵³ But in fashioning exorcism scenes for Jesus, Mark could still employ scriptural building blocks. In the scene at Capernaum in which Jesus expels an "unclean spirit" from a possessed man, the demon cries: "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God!" This has been inspired by the cry in 1 Kings 17:18 of Elijah's widowed landlady in Zarephath: "What have you against me, O man of God? Have you come to bring my sins to light and kill my son?" Such pervasive use of scripture to fashion such scenes would indicate that the evangelists had no specific traditions about miraculous incidents involving an actual Jesus.

Most of the exorcisms in Mark and the other Synoptics are not scenes that are detailed, but simply constitute a reference to the practice, including by Jesus' disciples to whom he has given authority to "drive out devils." One can deduce

from this that exorcism was perhaps the most important form of miracle claimed by the sect's preachers. (It was certainly the least verifiable.) But in 5:1-20, Mark has given us the most famous of all exorcism accounts, that of the Gerasene demoniac, possessed by a "Legion" of evil spirits. They, too, ask Jesus what he wants with them, then request to be transferred to a nearby herd of pigs which, once possessed, stampede over a cliff and drown in the lake. Much speculation has gone into what could possibly have occurred to prompt this bizarre story, or what the name "Legion" applied to the demons may have referred to, perhaps allegorically. Gerd Theissen has made the notable suggestion that it represented the wished-for fate of the Roman occupying army. Robert Price suggests a tie-in to the drowning of Pharaoh's fleet of chariots in the Exodus story of the parting of the Red Sea.

Additionally, we have another feasible source for this and other features of Mark's Gospel story, as put forward in a controversial book by Dennis R. MacDonald, *The Homeric Epics and the Gospel of Mark*. MacDonald sees many Markan scenes modeled on those of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. This is not an unreasonable idea, since Mark and early Christianity had one foot in a Greek culture where Homer was virtually the equivalent of holy scripture and would have been familiar to every schooled child. Price, in discussing the Gerasene Demoniac scene in his essay "The New Testament Narrative as Old Testament Midrash" (a forerunner to some of the content of *The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man*), compares the details of Mark's incident with their close counterparts in the Cyclops scene of the *Odyssey* (9:101-565). Somewhat like the issue of "parallels" between the overall Jesus story and the myths of ancient-world savior gods, if even half of MacDonald's comparisons in his book are compelling enough to preclude dismissal as coincidence—and they are—the high likelihood has been established that Homeric mythology had a degree of influence on Mark's inspiration, even if subordinated to his primary concern of midrash on the Jewish scriptures.

Other notable comparisons by MacDonald are the story of John the Baptist's execution by Herod and the *Odyssey*'s story of the murder of Agamemnon; the influence on Joseph of Arimathea from the *Iliad*'s King Priam who begged the Greeks to be allowed to take possession of the body of his slain son Hector; the Parable of the Wicked Tenants, which was quite possibly influenced by the story of Odysseus being absent from his estate and the evil suitors for his lonely wife plotting to kill his son Telemachus. The story of Paul's conversion in Acts on the road to Damascus has some of its roots in another ancient-world piece of literature, Euripedes' play *The Bacchae*.

Other healing miracles in Mark are direct formulations of the traditional prophecies that the arrival of God's kingdom, as noted above in various Isaiah passages, will be heralded and accompanied by such prodigies. How consistently successful the Q and Markan preachers might have been we have no way of knowing, even if Jesus, their symbol, rarely experienced failure. But the crafting of each of those healing scenes shows no sign of being based on an historically remembered event. All demonstrate dependence on scriptural elements. Mark's healing of the deaf and dumb man (7:32-37) and the healing of the blind man

(8:22-26) is simply an elaboration on those Isaian predictions, with an obvious reference to them in 7:37: "he even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak." Both scenes involve Jesus spitting on the afflicted sense, a common feature of miraculous healing procedures.

The raising of Jairus' daughter (5:21-24, 35-43) has close parallels in the raising by Elisha of the Shumanite woman's son in 2 Kings 4:18-37. The parent approaches Elisha/Jesus and begs that her child be helped. A subsidiary character declares that the child is dead and seeks to prevent any further troubling of the prophet. Elisha/Jesus nevertheless decides to go to see what can be done. Even the tiny detail that Elisha "shut the door on the two of them" (himself and the dead child), a feature of the Septuagint version Mark was using, is mirrored in his stipulation that Jesus "excluded the onlookers from going in to where the child lay" (5:40). Both prophets touch the child (Elisha more elaborately) who then rises to life. The parents are overcome with amazement at Jesus' miracle, while the Shumanite woman falls in obeisance at Elisha's feet.

Healing miracles were common in Hellenistic literature and they are very similar to Jesus' Gospel miracles both in substance and in literary style of reporting.¹⁵⁴ Accounts of miracles are found in the ancient Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Greek documents known as "magical papyri." The tales of heroes both legendary and historical included miracles allegedly performed by those figures, and the famous 'peer' of Jesus in the Greco-Roman world, Apollonius of Tyana, had many miracles imputed to him like those of Jesus.¹⁵⁵

The nature miracles are likewise securely rooted in scripture. The Stilling of the Storm (4:35-41) has the disciples in fear at the squall rising on the lake threatening to swamp their boat. They go to a sleeping Jesus and urge him to do something. Jesus rebukes them and calms the waters. Jonah 1:2-4 unfolds in the same way, except that Jonah's solution is to have himself thrown into the waters, which calms them. Psalm 107:23-29 is also present. Those "redeemed by the power of the Lord" (verse 2) include those who go down to the sea, and when storms arise they entreat the Lord to save them, and He stills the waves.

Jesus walking on the surface of the water (6:45-52), the fear of the disciples at this apparition, Jesus' identifying himself, the disciples remaining thick-headed: various close parallels in Exodus and the Iliad reveal Mark's inspiration for this scene.

Undoubtedly, the most famous non-healing miracle is the Feeding of the Multitude. Mark includes two of these which are virtually identical, and many have been the theories as to why the author did this, especially when he presents the dim-witted disciples as equally short-sighted in the second episode as they were in the first about the feasibility of feeding so many with so little. This is not the only case of them failing to learn anything from Jesus' earlier examples or teachings. Perhaps Mark wanted to convey precisely this, and so created a second near-identical situation to illustrate it. Another possibility is a suggestion by MacDonald. As Price notes: "The reason Mark has two feeding miracles is to emulate Homer, who has Odysseus' son Telemachus attend two feasts, and Mark has borrowed details from both." There is even the possibility that the earliest version of Mark did not have the second feeding miracle, since Luke is noted for

lacking the Markan material from 6:45 to 8:10, the second miracle coming at the end of this block. (Also, see below and note 158.)

At the same time, the scholarly recognition that the feeding miracles are midrashically based on the story in 2 Kings 4:42-44 of Elisha multiplying twenty barley loaves to feed a hundred men is plain to see. The available food is tallied, there is a protest that it will not be enough, all are nevertheless fed, and there is food left over. Similar features with a different application can also be found in 1 Kings 17:10-16, in which Elijah makes a single jar of flour produce endless cakes and a flask of oil never fail, in order to provide an indefinite source of food for a widow and her family.

Critical scholarship regularly attempts to offer a 'secular' explanation of what might really have happened to give rise to such traditions about Jesus' alleged miracles. But when the sources of Mark's fashioning of such scenes are made evident, this becomes a pointless exercise. Nothing did happen. No original event gave rise to exaggerated traditions which in any case are witnessed to nowhere in the early Christian record outside the Gospel story. Whether true or exaggerated, such traditions should have had a compelling effect on the epistle writers, yet none of them so much as allude to their Jesus working any sort of miracle. Attempts to rationalize the miracles is as meaningless as the similar attempt by modern astronomers who offer to 'explain' the Star of Bethlehem in terms of possible astronomical phenomena, from planetary juxtapositions to a supernova. The simplest explanation is that these things never took place. They are the literary invention of the evangelists drawing on scripture and popular myth and literature.

All of this illustrates that other important device of midrash: take a biblical story and retell it in a new setting with new characters. For the community applying such a tale to itself, this procedure transferred all the associations attached to the old tale: God's involvement, the sense of significance for the community and the time it lived in, and most important, a continuity with the past. If Mark's community was essentially a gentile one, as many think, such a parallel linked those who regarded themselves as a new Israel with their adopted Jewish heritage.

Miracle Collections

A common theory is that Mark and John had access to previously circulating collections of traditions about Jesus' miracles. These would have been similar to the 'biographies' of famous men and gods in the Hellenistic period, which often amounted to little more than a listing (called an "aretalogy") of miraculous exploits attributed to them.¹⁵⁶ But in the New Testament we have no way of telling if or when such collections had been assembled before the Gospels, or who they may have been imputed to. They may have been collections of miracles that were previously claimed by the community as witness to the kingdom. If so, they were the midrashic product of writers previous to Mark, though it remains very likely that at least some of them are Mark's own product. What we *can* say is that not a single Christian writer prior to the Gospels seems to be familiar with any such collections, or any such miracles.

That they are artificial literary creations, and not reflective of actual traditions about a Jesus of Nazareth, is also evident when we view them as a set. Burton Mack (*A Myth of Innocence*, p.215f) details the research of Paul Achtemeier⁷ who showed that Mark contains two separate sets of five miracle stories which are identical in type and overall pattern. Each set begins with a sea-crossing miracle: the Stilling of the Storm (4:35-41) and Walking on the Sea (6:45-51). Each ends with an account of feeding the multitudes: the 5000 (6:34-44) and the 4000 (8:1-10). In between are one exorcism and two healing miracles.¹⁵⁸

Such patterns can only be a literary product, with individual units fashioned to provide the necessary elements of the pattern. (It can hardly be the case that Mark just happened to receive miracle traditions which corresponded to components of his desired pattern for two sets.) The two outer miracles in the pattern have Exodus connections. The first is a parallel to the crossing of the Red Sea; the last is a parallel to the miraculous feeding of the people during the wanderings in Sinai. This requirement of his pattern may be the reason why Mark included two feeding miracles, even if he ran out of inspiration to make the second different from the first. These invented accounts served to portray Jesus as a new Moses, following the very pattern of Moses' own actions.

Besides miracles, other associations with the all-important tale of Moses and the establishment of the Sinai covenant are present. Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness corresponds to Moses' 40-year exile in the desert of Midian before returning to Egypt. The announcement at the beginning of his ministry that the kingdom of God was at the door (1:15) corresponds to Moses' announcement to the enslaved Hebrews that God was about to effect their freedom. Then we have the Transfiguration scene in Mark 9:1-13, full of scriptural elements. Moses ascends Mt. Sinai in Exodus 24, taking only a select group of Israelites, ultimately only Joshua, just as Jesus ascends a "high mountain" with only Peter, James and John. As a cloud covers the mount of Sinai, out of which God speaks his directives, so too does a cloud cover the mountain when God speaks to Jesus, declaring him the Beloved Son—which, like the baptismal declaration, is drawn from Psalm 2:7. While he is there, Jesus' garments shine dazzling white, "whiter than even a fuller can achieve." Matthew and Luke add that his face, too, changed and shone. All are dependent on the transfiguration of Moses before the people when he descended from Sinai with the tablets in Exodus 34:29-30. A companion source is likely Malachi 3:2, as Price (from J. Duncan Dennett) points out: "But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap." In Malachi 3:1 there is a reference to the appearance of Elijah as the messenger preparing the way of the Lord, and Elijah puts in an appearance at Jesus' own transfiguration. The scriptural motifs come fast and thick.

Thus the miracles of Jesus are the construction of the evangelist or his community. They confer a symbolic significance on the sect in relation to an important prototype in scripture, namely the Exodus story. As the Jews led by Moses were destined to enter the Promised Land, so too will the followers of the kingdom sect, symbolized in Jesus. (If nothing else, to portray the community in this way, Mark needed a symbolic character, whether he thought one had existed

or not, who could serve as a parallel to Moses.) Mark's miracles helped suggest that the community could look upon itself as the new Chosen People. Once again, a Gospel feature reveals itself as midrash, a reworking of biblical precedents to provide new meaning and import to the community itself. It is not in any way representative of history or traditions going back to a Jesus.¹⁵⁹

The overall view of much of the 1st century preaching movement, whether kingdom or cultic, was that God's relationship with the world had entered a new phase. He was establishing a new covenant, one that would supersede the old. The elements involved in establishing the old covenant had to be incorporated into the story of the new one. Jesus, as symbolic representative of the Markan community, was a new Moses. His birth, when it came to be rendered by Matthew and Luke, had much in common with the birth tale of Moses. Jesus, as we have seen, performs miracles similar to the ones attending the Exodus. The object was to show that Jesus, which is to say the sect itself, represented a new process of salvation. Israel entering the Promised Land, in true midrash fashion, served to prefigure the community's entry into the new kingdom of God.

The old covenant had also been marked by a blood sacrifice of animals, performed by Moses. In Mark, Jesus himself serves as the sacrifice required to establish the new covenant, and he speaks words at a Last Supper scene which are a close parallel to those spoken by Moses. It may have been features like this which drew Mark and his group to the Christ cult, with its sacrifice of Christ in the mythical realm. Those potential associations between the two Traditions would have been very appealing to a kingdom community that could open its mind to such symbolism.

Mark's Gospel was a religious statement. In a sectarian context, it justified and embodied the beliefs and practices of the community in poetic and symbolic terms. It also mirrored the darker side of its outlook, a resentment at the outside world's rejection of its reforms and doctrines. The plot against Jesus by the religious establishment, as well as Jesus' condemnation of the Jewish authorities and their values, undoubtedly mirrored a real-life situation. The story of Jesus' fate and his ultimate triumph may have reflected the conviction that, even if they kill us, we will rise again when the kingdom comes.

The Later Synoptics

When Matthew and Luke took over Mark's midrashic story, they enriched some of his scenes with further details of their own and added ones which Mark did not have. Matthew in particular, unlike Mark, chose to identify many of his scriptural sources. He presented them as prophecies which Jesus had fulfilled, though this did not prevent him from relying exclusively on such passages in scripture to craft his new scenes and additions; in other words, Matthew had Jesus fulfilling scripture by presenting fulfillments he himself (or Mark) had created *out of* scripture. There is virtually no sign of independent traditions he could have been drawing on—excepting the material he took from Q. Even here, the 'teachings' had stood alone in Q, so that Matthew, as well as Luke, had been forced to supply his own contexts. The handful of Q anecdotes which Matthew and Luke took over also bear signs of being later constructions by the Q

redactors rather than historical fingerprints, and they fit the concept that they were originally applied to the Q prophets themselves. Matthew's scene of the guards at the tomb is patently apologetic in nature and is witnessed to by no other evangelist; nor is there evidence in the wider Christian or Jewish record of such an apologetic (see chapter 32). Beyond minor promptings from Daniel, it seems to be the product of Matthew's own imagination and literary purposes.

Both Matthew and Luke have crafted nativity stories for Jesus which are built entirely out of scriptural and other mythological bricks. Almost all of the details are different between the two, as one would expect from independent literary invention (just as the post-Markan resurrection appearances are irreconcilably different). However, it was unavoidable that both would choose Bethlehem as the birthplace, since the prophecy in Micah 5:2 could not be overlooked:

But you, O Bethlehem...from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.

We have seen that the names of Jesus' parents, common to Matthew and Luke, could have been drawn from Mark (in the case of mother Mary) and perhaps whatever lies behind the more primitive nativity scene of the Ascension of Isaiah in chapter 11; they may ultimately be dependent on the biblical Joseph and Miriam the sister of Moses. No one before the Gospels mentions a mother of Jesus, let alone her name; Paul's "born of woman" in Galatians 4:4 (if authentic to him) is the only reference to the very concept. Placing Jesus' birth at the end of the reign of Herod the Great may have been a numerical calculation required by the placement of the ministry at the time of Pilate and John the Baptist. Such a placement may have been a simple plot choice by Mark (Pilate was suitably infamous), or it may also have been governed by the dating of Q's John as well as by memories that the Christ cult, with its legendary apostles like Peter and John whom Mark enlisted as his followers of Jesus of Nazareth, had emerged around that time.

But Herod also served other midrashic purposes. Indeed, he was crucial to Matthew in fashioning a tale based on the birth of Moses. Robert Price notes that Matthew may have drawn on Josephus' retelling of the biblical story in his *Antiquities of the Jews*, for certain pertinent elements in that version appear here. (This suggests a composition for Matthew in the 2nd century, since Josephus' book was only published in 93 CE.) Like the Pharaoh who slew the first-born of Egyptian Israel, Herod, known for his cruelty and indiscriminate murders, could be presented as doing the same to the infants of Bethlehem in an attempt to slay the newborn Messiah who would usurp the secular power. Such an attempt to eliminate a famous hero at birth is another mytheme of ancient mythology.

Matthew introduced two further common motifs attendant on the birth of great men: a portent in the heavens and wise or prominent men paying homage to the new child. The former is allotted to figures like Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar and Augustus; the latter has a striking example in the famous wall-engraving once at the Temple of Luxor in Egypt, in which the birth of the new Pharaoh, representing the god Osiris, is presented in terms of an Annunciation, Conception, Birth and Adoration of the Child. As Gerald Massey described the

latter scene in the mural: "Here the infant is enthroned, receiving homage from the gods and gifts from men...on the right three men are kneeling offering gifts in the right hand, and life with the left."¹⁶⁰

Those "astrologers from the east" in Matthew's story, bearing their own gifts, are generally thought of as Persian magi, so it becomes a matter of some wonder that they could have been familiar with the prophecy in an obscure Hebrew prophetic book. But this serves as a device for Matthew to relay the information to Herod about the birth of the Messiah. The infamous Slaughter of the Innocents is not attested to in any historian or commentator of the time, but may have been inspired by Herod's practice of murdering relatives whom he believed were plotting against him. The fact that so many different precedents can be seen to have fed into the creation of Gospel elements gives one an inkling of the spirit of composition in that era and the stimuli operating on the writers. In this case, we have Herod's own practices, the biblical precedent in the Moses story, other similar Middle Eastern legends attached to figures like Sargon II of Assyria, as well as a biblical passage in Jeremiah:

Lamentation is heard in Ramah, and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her sons. She refuses to be comforted, they are no more. [31:15]

Matthew quotes this verse and says that the words of the prophet were fulfilled. Since there is no record anywhere of such an event, and since it is identical to so many legendary and scriptural precedents, one is forced to assume that Matthew is under no illusion that his words are to be taken literally. He has created his own event to provide the fulfillment of that passage in scripture. Even scriptural fulfillment becomes something allegorical. What that says to the entire concept of historicity in the Gospels is quite illuminating.

That these are elements of Matthew's own choosing is indicated by the fact that neither the magi nor the slaughter of infants by Herod finds a place in the nativity story crafted by Luke. Matthew is consequently the only one to have the Holy Family flee into Egypt to escape Herod's wrath. He tells the reader, "This was to fulfill what the Lord had declared through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I called my son'." We must assume, in the same way, that the entire concept of the flight was triggered by this passage in Hosea 11:1, even though in the Old Testament text this is clearly a reference to Israel, God's child, whom he rescued from Egypt. Early Christian writers' penchant for reading scripture atomistically (taking words and phrases out of context), and imposing on their excisions anything they chose to see in them, undercuts the entire concept of biblical prophecy of Christ, which has been for so many, among believers ancient and modern, the proof of choice that Jesus was the Son of God.

That Mary was a virgin at the conception of Jesus is likewise a derivation by Matthew from Isaiah 7:14, which he quotes in 1:23:

Behold, the virgin will conceive in the womb and bear a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God with us.'

The Greek Septuagint, being used by Matthew, made specific—as "virgin"—a word which in the original Hebrew was not so precise, but simply referred to a

"young girl." It is difficult to say whether this was the source of the eventual Christian doctrine that Jesus had been born of a virgin, or was merely used as a handy proof-text for a desirable feature to be given him. But in Matthew's use of Isaiah 7:14 as a "prophecy" one can see the flexibility he assumed in making use of Old Testament texts for New Testament midrash: he seems to have ignored without qualm a glaring discrepancy. The name applied to the child in the Isaiah passage was Immanuel, 'God with us'; this, of course, is entirely different from the name of the allegedly prophesied "Jesus" which means Savior, or "Yahweh saves." And in Isaiah's time, the only 'Savior' was God himself. Matthew was also presumably able to apply the same mental adaptation to his presentation of the genealogy of Jesus as Son of David through the paternal line of Joseph, in order to make him a descendant of David—even though he hedges at the end (1:16): "...and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ."

Luke, while also referring to Mary as "virgin," avoids any direct comparison with Isaiah 7:14, though he too hedges on Jesus' physical paternity; it was only "supposed" that he was the son of Joseph. Since son by adoption would hardly satisfy the biblical expectation, one has to assume that both evangelists felt that the requirements of their story did not include a need to resolve this fundamental discrepancy. Perhaps metaphorical descent from David was permissible in an allegorical story about a symbolic character. (One might note that if allegorical descent from David was good enough for Matthew and Luke, it could have been enough for Paul in a mystical/mythical sense in Romans 1:3.)

When we turn to Luke's version of the birth of Jesus, we are given an entirely unique preface to it, the story of two children in their wombs, now cousins, 'meeting' for the first time. As John the Baptist was turned into a herald of Jesus as early as Q, Luke places the recognition of that relative status in the pre-natal stage—quite possibly for the same political purpose: to counter the claims of a contemporary Baptist sect. Luke also in this way gives greater weight to John as the forerunner 'Elijah' figure; the expectation of his arrival as vanguard to the Messiah was virtually as strong as that of the Messiah himself.

The conception of John by the hitherto barren and distressed Elizabeth is lifted from the similar conception of Samuel by the equally barren and distressed Hannah in 1 Samuel 1. Both women rejoice at the lifting of their shame. There is a parallel, too, with the barrenness of Sarah, wife of Abraham, in Genesis, who also conceived an important figure late in life. The "Magnificat" placed in either Elizabeth's or Mary's mouth (manuscripts differ in the attribution of 1:46a) is a recasting of the Song of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2:1-10, with other scriptural allusions inserted as well.

Where Matthew had Mary's conception announced to her husband Joseph in a dream (Mary remains a background cipher throughout Matthew's nativity sequence, with the chronically slumbering Joseph occupying center stage), Luke makes Joseph mute and presents Mary as a living, speaking character, although her words can be considered in no way historical. Neither are those of the announcing angel, who speaks to Mary in both Gospels by reworking God's announcement to Abraham in Genesis 17:19: "Your wife Sarah shall bear you a

son, and you shall call him Isaac." The announcement to Elizabeth was modeled on the one to the mother of Samson in Judges 13:2-5, as well as the one to Hagar in Genesis 16:11. Indeed, the connection between Hagar and Sarah, wives of Abraham who gave birth to related but contrasting sons, may well have inspired the "kinswoman" relationship created by Luke between the mothers of John and Jesus, who were now turned into cousins in their intertwined lives.

Even the smallest details in scenes like these can be seen to be derived from scripture. In the annunciation to Zechariah, John's father, Luke has him expressing objection and doubt at the angel's message. Mary, too, objects to her angel's announcement: "How can this be, when I have no husband?" Both are inspired by Genesis 17:17 in which Abraham expresses skepticism at God's declaration that his barren 90-year old wife will bear a son. Price points out that there are parallels here, too, with the commissioning stories of Moses (Ex. 3:10-12) and Jeremiah (Jer. 1:4-8) in which each of those worthies "objects to the divine summons and his objection is overruled." Luke has Zechariah suffer for his skepticism (he is rendered mute until John is born and named, and perhaps there is even an internal parallel in his rendering of Joseph unofficially mute throughout his nativity scene). As for John leaping in the womb when he senses his superior approaching in Mary's womb, this is a twist on the Genesis scene of 25:22 (the Septuagint version) in which the yet-unborn twins of Rebecca, destined to be competing sons, leaped in her womb.

We can perceive a close resemblance between the annunciation to Mary and the immediately preceding annunciation to Elizabeth's husband Zechariah, a phenomenon encountered several times throughout the Gospels where we can identify one scene as being built on an earlier scene, or combination of scenes, either in the same evangelist's Gospel or in another Gospel—what amounts to a midrash on midrash. The two annunciation scenes follow exactly the same pattern: the respective characters are set out, an angel appears, both recipients are afraid and told not to be, each is given the news of a son and his name-to-be, his greatness, both express skepticism which the angel reacts to. Nothing here has anything to do with historical tradition, or even oral development of early Christian imaginings. It has all the marks of invention by Luke from start to finish, based solely on scripture.

Considering that this entire sequence follows directly on the much-vaunted Prologue (Lk. 1:1-4), in which the author declares that he is drawing on many written accounts and "matters handed down to us by the original eyewitnesses and servants of the word"—something regularly appealed to by those defending Luke the historian—this should indicate the dubious integrity of Luke's 'history' and the actual nature of his writing. The Prologue concludes with Luke's declaration to "Theophilus" that he is receiving accurate knowledge of the truth he has been taught, indicating that concepts of truth, knowledge and accuracy in the religious mind of early Christianity were quite different from our own, and that we need to approach the Gospels from the point of view of an entirely other mindset. (The original 'Luke' may, however, be excused in this particular case, since the Prologue is probably the product of an ecclesiastical editor of the mid 2nd century.)

When we get to the nativity scene proper in Luke (2:1-20), we find that in a passage which sounds as though the author is attempting to provide actual historical details as background, insoluble problems abound. No such decree for universal taxation is recorded, a taxation of this sort even in Judea would not have taken place at this time, Quirinius as governor of Syria is out of sync with the dating of Herod's reign, and the spectacle of huge numbers of people traveling to the cities of distant ancestors for tax registration is neither recorded nor feasible. Could Luke, as any kind of concerned historian, have gotten so much wrong? Or was he simply not concerned with history, but only with his own plot line? He needed a rationale for getting Joseph and Mary from Nazareth, where Mark had placed Jesus from the start, to Bethlehem the city of David for purposes of the birth, and did not care if what he came up with made little historical sense.

One also has to remember that when our small-town anonymous author, like the other evangelists, was sitting at his writing desk, he could hardly have envisioned what the future would make of his creation: the millions of souls that would regard his words as the sacred writings of God, the thousands of historians and exegetes who would dissect each thought and phrase to question or verify the nature and accuracy of everything he wrote, something on which salvation could depend. For Luke's purposes, for his own community whose members would hardly have been in a position to know or be worried about historical accuracy, his shaky plot line would have sufficed to carry an allegorical story. Considerations of strict background precision could well have seemed immaterial. (Modern Hollywood screenwriters can be equally blasé about such precision in regard to most 'historical' dramas, apparently similarly considering that entertainment and 'message' trumps veracity.)

Luke has nothing at all to say about visiting magi under moving stars, about Herod's concern with the child or his slaughter of the Bethlehem infants. He, unlike Matthew, has Mary give birth in a stable attended by shepherds, probably following a mytheme which has famous men born in obscure and lowly fashion. Another theme in myth has bystanders noting the newborn and recognizing future greatness, which may be Luke's inspiration for the devout Simeon (2:25-35) and the prophetess Anna (2:36-38). Immediately after this, (2:41-52), Luke borrows yet another popular mytheme of the young hero exhibiting his wisdom and abilities at an early age (including examples in the Old Testament, such as Daniel, Moses and Solomon), crafting a scene for the 12-year-old Jesus in the Temple, amazing the elders with his intelligence and insight into the scriptures. Like Matthew independently of him, tradition has nothing to do with any of this. Each evangelist has plumbed the Hebrew bible and other sources to invent midrashic material for the infancy and younger days of their own hero. Even the recurring pronouncement that Jesus grew in strength and wisdom, enjoying the favor of both God and men, is expressed in the words of scripture: "Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and with men" (1 Sam. 2:26).

When we look at the midrashic content of Matthew, we find that he takes over almost all of Mark's, but he also makes changes to it, to 'correct' and better

align it with the "prophecies" he is drawing from the Septuagint, both in details and in vocabulary. Randel Helms calls this "a fictional correction of a fictional account" (*Gospel Fictions*, p.77-80: Helms provides clear details of this in regard to the Stilling of the Storm and the Walking on the Sea). Helms also points out that both Matthew and Luke have cut two healing miracles from Mark, that of the deaf mute (7:33-35) and of the blind man (8:23-25) because they contained what, to them, were objectionable elements casting Jesus in a 'common' light: requiring magic words and spittle to effect his cures. Both later evangelists supplied a replacement (Matthew 12:22 and Luke 11:14), since they still needed something to fulfill Isaiah's predictions. Matthew, in his obsession with precise correspondences, makes his healed man both a deaf mute and blind, to cover both of the deleted Markan cures (Helms, *op.cit.*, p.72).

Luke is a Gospel concerned with the mission to the gentiles. It inhabits that world and may come from Syria or eastern Asia Minor, perhaps two decades into the 2nd century. Thus the symbolic depiction of Jesus is slanted toward that agenda: to justify it, to reinterpret the movement in those terms. (Acts as a follow-up to the redacted mid-2nd century version of Luke—the now canonical one—continues Luke's gentile-oriented agenda with Paul's mission abroad.) The commissioning of the 70 (or 72) apostles as a vanguard to "every city and place where (Jesus) was about to come" (10: If) symbolizes the movement's mission to the supposed 70/72 nations in the world. (See Robert Price, *The Pre-Nicene New Testament*, p.526, n.'y'.) The directions put into Jesus' mouth are mostly from Deuteronomy, which is Luke, throughout this section of his Gospel, depicting Jesus, says Price, "as a prophet like Moses, promulgating a second law just as Moses offered in Deuteronomy." As the Israelites moved into the Promised Land, so too does Luke's Christianity move into the new world of the gentiles.

The story of the raising of the widow of Nain's son (Lk. 7:11-17) seems inspired by the story of Elijah raising the widow of Zarephthal's son in 1 Kings 17:17-24. Luke also adopts a procedure of taking individual elements of an Old Testament passage, rather than the whole thing, and using them to flesh out a different episode. But with his Ascension scene at the end of the Gospel, the derivation from Elijah's own ascension in 2 Kings is whole and direct. Both are attended by one or more disciples, Elijah bestows on Elisha "a double share of (his) spirit," while Jesus promises to his disciples their reception of the "power out of heaven"—something the author of Acts fulfills by the descent of the Spirit on them at Pentecost. The two ascensions are described as a parting/separation from the disciple(s).

Midrash in John and the Acts of the Apostles

In the Gospel of John, the portrayal of Jesus is dramatically different from that of the Synoptics, but even here the evangelist draws on scriptural precedent for many of his scenes. A notable one is the exchange between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well (4:1-30). There are several scenes in the Old Testament in which the hero goes to a well, meets a woman and sometimes asks for a drink: Abraham's servant and Rebecca (Gen. 24:15-18), Jacob and Rachel (Gen. 19:1-14), Moses and Zipporah (Ex. 2:16-17), Saul and the women at the

well of Zuph (1 Samuel 9:11). In 1 Kings 17:10, Elijah meets a woman at Zarephthah (though not at a well), and asks for a drink. She is a widow, while the Samaritan woman in John has had five failed marriages. Elijah ends up giving the widow flour and oil that never run out, that she may never hunger again; Jesus offers the Samaritan woman the water of life—namely, himself—that guarantees she will never thirst again.

But the most famous of all Gospel miracles is the raising of Lazarus, an event that appears only in John. This is not surprising, since it is clear that John has made the thing up himself. Robert Price points out that John has conflated two stories from Luke. The first (10:38-42) involves Jesus visiting the home of Mary and Martha, where there is no sign of any brother Lazarus; in both stories the women chastise Jesus. The second is Luke's parable of the rich man and Lazarus (16:19-31), in which both die and it is proposed that the beggar return to earth to urge the rich man's brothers to repent, something judged as fruitless. In John, Lazarus does indeed return, with fruitless results for winning over Jesus' detractors, who continue their plot to kill him.¹⁶¹

Acts, too, is rife with midrashic invention. The scene of the descent of the Spirit on the apostles at Pentecost (nowhere attested to in any of the epistles) is inspired by the scene in Numbers, where the elders of Israel are gathered and God descends to confer the spirit upon them, taking it from Moses himself. Bishop Spong also observes the significance of its basic elements:

Luke's account of Pentecost was simply lifted out of its Jewish context, and few recognized that the symbol of fire had a long Jewish history—from the pillar of fire in the wilderness to the fire associated with the prophet Elijah—or that the mighty rushing wind that indicated the presence of the Spirit came out of the desert people's concept of a God who was Spirit and out of their understanding of the wind as the breath of God. The disappearance of language barriers in Luke's Pentecost narrative did get connected with that ancient story of the tower of Babel, where God was said to have confused the languages of the people to prevent the completion of the tower to heaven (Gen. 11: Iff). [*Resurrection: Myth or Reality?*, p.6]

Another indication, besides the anachronisms mentioned earlier, that the scene in Acts 6 involving the Hellenists-Hebrews dispute over feeding the widows is fiction, rests on its resemblance to the scene in Exodus 18:13-26. There, concern that Moses is wearing himself out in personally administering justice and directives to the people in their wanderings leads to the advice that he should choose elders to handle the mundane matters. In Acts 6, the Hebrew leadership fears being overwhelmed by both the demands of prayer and preaching, and the needs of the community's meal provision. The community is summoned and seven men are chosen to handle the latter duties.

On the subject of food, Act's author crafted the all-important scene of Peter's vision (10:9-16) that all foods may be considered fit to eat by drawing on the visions of Ezekiel, often with close correspondence in dialogue. (See Helms, *op. cit.*, p.20-21). Descriptions of Peter's miracles (3:1f, 5:15f, 9:33 and 36f) are modeled on those of Jesus, a reflection of Isaiah-like expectations. This is part of

a tendency, as Price puts it, "to make the apostle into another Christ," as in the imprisonment and escape of Peter in Acts 12:1-17. This is Price's description of Peter's "Jesus-like Passion narrative," another vivid example of constructing midrash on midrash:

Note how Jacob's beheading echoes that of John the Baptist. Peter's death is postponed because of the Passover, just like Jesus. Peter's cell is analogous to Jesus' tomb, from which an angel delivers him. The door, like the stone at the tomb, is moved away by the presence of an angel. As in Matthew, the guards standing watch are futile. The chains can hold Peter no more than the "pangs of death" could hold Jesus (Acts 2:24). The "risen" Peter, like Jesus, appears suddenly where his despairing disciples are gathered behind locked doors. A woman is the first to discern his presence, recognizing his voice, as in John 20:16. She runs to report the news, as do Mary Magdalene and the others, but the hard-headed men dismiss it as nonsense until Peter forces himself upon their notice. He gives them parting directions, implicitly putting James the Just in charge, as Jesus did Peter. As Jesus went to heaven, Peter goes into hiding... [*The Pre-Nicene New Testament*, p.594, n.'s']

The famous Road to Damascus conversion scene, which appears three times in Acts (all with somewhat different details), is nowhere attested to by Paul himself. Perhaps this is because it is a retelling by the author of Acts of a similar story in 2 Maccabees 3. King Seleucus of the Hellenistic kingdom of Syria hears the repute of a great treasure in the Temple at Jerusalem. He dispatches his minister Heliodorus to investigate and seize this treasure. At the very door of the Temple, an apparition created by God unseats Heliodorus from his horse and he falls to the ground blinded, his mission thwarted. He is carried away into the city. The Jews decide they had better pray for Heliodorus' recovery, fearing the wrath of the Seleucid king; so God sends angels to cure him and announce his deliverance. Heliodorus is enjoined to declare his faith in the God of the Jews. He complies, and does sacrifice to him.

The Saul-Paul conversion in Acts 9:1-22 is a virtual carbon copy. On his way to prosecute the new Christians of Damascus, Saul is thrown to the ground by an apparition of Jesus, blinded by the light. He is carried into the city by others. Once there, God sends to him a Christian disciple who cures him of his blindness and enjoins him to receive the Holy Spirit. Paul accepts the offer and is baptized, henceforth proclaiming Jesus in public.

As for Acts' conclusion in the dramatic sea voyage to Rome, this has long been recognized as owing a debt to Hellenistic romance novels of the sea, with all of their perilous and heroic touches. No knowledge of this event of Paul's life can be found anywhere until the dissemination of the Acts document sometime after the middle of the 2nd century.

As an account of the career of Paul, and of the course of the early Christian movement generally, the Acts of the Apostles is no more historical than the Gospels are an historical account of Jesus.

The Suffering Righteous One and A Tale from Scripture

A Single Witness

For almost nineteen centuries, Christians, along with much of the rest of the world, have believed that their religion arose out of the events of the Gospel passion story. Jesus went to Jerusalem and was there arrested. He was tried by the Roman governor Pontius Pilate at the instigation of the Jewish authorities, crucified outside the city at a place called Calvary, and laid in a nearby tomb. Not everyone in the world over that length of time has believed that he actually rose from his resting place three days later, but doubters have always addressed the question by offering alternate explanations for the Christian perception that he had done so.

An entire faith movement, one of the world's major religions, is assumed to have been launched by those Gospel events. Yet if that were indeed the reality of history, we would face a profoundly astonishing situation. For the fact is, the story which presumably began so much and won over so many people is to be traced back to a single document, to the literary efforts of what may well have been a single individual.

We have already seen that until the time of Ignatius early in the 2nd century, no one in the non-Gospel Christian record speaks of a trial and crucifixion by Pilate, of a death in Jerusalem or a rising from a tomb in that location. Moreover, contrary to popular belief, Mark himself has no corroboration. Christian tradition for the better part of two millennia has regarded the four Gospels as independent accounts of the events of Jesus' life and death, by persons in the know, providing a fourfold witness to those events. Most Christians today still believe that. But New Testament scholars know better, and they have known it for almost two centuries. They have come to realize that the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, rather than being independent corroborations, are direct copies of Mark. Matthew reproduces almost 90% of Mark in his own text, Luke over 50%. As for the passion itself, those two later evangelists have shaped their accounts exactly as Mark did, with only a few minor alterations and additions. Even the extra source used by both, the Q document, had nothing to add to their passion story, since Q contained not a word about a trial, death and resurrection. It is as though Matthew and Luke knew nothing about the events at the end of Jesus' life, the events which brought salvation to the world and triggered the great explosion that became Christianity, until they encountered a copy of the Gospel of Mark.

Yet all of this should be regarded as an impossible situation. If something even remotely like those events had taken place and the Christian movement had begun in response to them, the Christian world could not fail to have been saturated with traditions about Jesus' death and rising, even if they contained much embellishment and inaccuracy, even if they were largely unreliable. Indeed, we would expect precisely that state of affairs. For the early record shows us that the Christian movement during its first hundred years was a sprawling, uncoordinated, diverse organism marked by division and often incompatible theologies. We would expect that all those communities or regions would have preserved and developed their own angles on the passion events. They would inevitably have found different things to focus on, different characters or story elements to develop in relation to their own interests and faith. Many would have relied on different witnesses who would have observed and reported on different things. Over the course of decades, each community would have absorbed and distilled these varying inputs, resulting in a story of its own making. Diversity would be the order of the day.

Yet not only do we find none of this expected variety of passion traditions among the many Christian communities of the empire, we see no sign of any traditions at all for at least the first half century of the movement. That all these Christian groups could have lived and worshiped for that length of time, with no traditions or passion accounts of their own until one community, one person probably somewhere in Syria, decided to put down on paper the traditions which he had managed to acquire about the death of Jesus, cannot be accepted.

But Matthew and Luke show us precisely that. Even if their communities had not actually written such things down, they would surely have possessed their own oral descriptions of Jesus' passion and death. Those traditions would have been added to the mix when they came to rework Mark. Yet there is no sign of such a thing. The passion stories of Matthew and Luke follow in lockstep with that of Mark. Matthew adds a few minor details, such as the death of Judas, the guard at the tomb, the rising of some of the city's dead. Luke's notable addition is the hearing before Herod, when Pilate sends Jesus to be interviewed by the Tetrarch before finally passing judgment himself.

Of course, there are all sorts of ground-level changes which the two later evangelists have made, just as they have throughout the whole of their Gospels. They are constantly altering the words and details of Mark to reflect their own writing styles and editorial emphases, and to make improvements. But the overall shape and content is precisely the same. We see no evidence of a passion tradition present in the Matthean or Lukan communities before the Gospel of Mark came along. And the epistles and other early writings show that no one else had one either.

For that matter, Matthew and Luke, and by extension their communities, show little sign of possessing a developed set of traditions even about Jesus' ministry. The structure of their pre-passion story follows Mark's general outline and content, supplemented by the Q material which they have differently fitted into the Markan pattern. Luke has several elements which are unique to himself, notably parables such as the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son, but these are

best seen as his own invention, if only because one would expect that such powerful and effective examples of teaching, if they were the product of Jesus or the early church, would be known to the other evangelists.

Robert Funk, in his *Honest to Jesus* (p.237-8), has this observation to make:

It is strange that no source outside the five gospels [he is including the Gospel of Peter, not Thomas] knows this same sequence of events, even in outline...If the passion story were well known, it seems likely that others would have referred to it, at least in outline.

What Funk fails to further observe is that no one has *any* sequence of events in regard to a passion story.

The traditionalist might claim that, well, since the story is true, once Mark's successors came to write down their version, it would conform closely to Mark's in any event. But those factors outlined above would ensure that even a 'true' story would, in the context of a widely diffused movement like Christianity, inevitably suffer change and differing emphases, as well as the addition of 'untrue' embellishment.

We can demonstrate that principle by looking at what happens in Matthew and Luke after they run out of Markan material. The original Gospel of Mark ended at 16:8. The women have gone to the tomb and found it empty, the angel announces Jesus has risen and they run off in fear. From that point on, Matthew is completely unlike Luke. The post-resurrection appearances added by the two evangelists involve different characters and a different sequence of events. Luke's road to Emmaus scene has no counterpart in Matthew. The two evangelists cannot even agree on where Jesus appeared to his disciples. Matthew has such a meeting take place in Galilee, while in Luke everything happens in Jerusalem. Whether all of it is sheer invention on their part, or whether one chooses to believe that some of it is based on traditions which have developed since the supposed time of Jesus, the point is that those details, their setting, their sequences are dramatically different. *That* is the situation we should find in the Gospels in regard to the entire passion account.

Recasting Mark

Not only have modern scholars long known that Matthew and Luke are dependent on Mark, they have also perceived that the changes, and some of the additions, which those later evangelists have made to their principal source are consistently determined by their own personal agendas and community situations. What must now be ruled out is any thought that those changes and additions were based on different or fuller traditions reaching the evangelists. The Q document, of course, has been incorporated into the mix, but even here both Matthew and Luke have altered it in keeping with their own agendas. All this was done on their own initiatives to serve immediate interests that had nothing to do with reflecting or clarifying actual history.

One of Matthew's primary concerns is to preserve the integrity of the Jewish Law, but as part of a remodeling of that ancient moral guide. Jesus in Matthew is made to conform to that objective, and Matthew arranges Jesus' preaching

material—much of it drawn from Q—into five blocks throughout his Gospel symbolically representing a new version of the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses in the Hebrew bible. He is the most Jewish oriented of the four evangelists; he and his community are usually regarded as "Jewish-Christian." Luke, writing probably somewhat later than Matthew in a much more gentile setting, reflects not only the world of Hellenism which Christianity has entered, he lives at a time when Mark's apocalyptic expectations about the immediate arrival of the End-time and the Parousia of the Son of Man have receded, and thus he is concerned with dampening such expectations. Luke's orientation is toward the salvation that the Church now offers in the context of a future that extends indefinitely. The Gospel of John is driven by its own agenda, its presentation of Jesus as a divine being, notably unlike the Jesus of the Synoptics, and a proclaimer of himself as the sole avenue of salvation.¹⁶²

Illustration of the ways the later Gospel writers have edited and improved on Mark could fill a book. Here we will survey a few representative examples.

Matthew, anxious for the preservation of the Jewish Law—he has Jesus declare in 5:18 that "not a dot, not an iota, shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished"—must correct Mark when he had Jesus discuss what can, and what cannot, make a man unclean (7:14-23): "Nothing that goes into a man from outside can defile him," in reference to the eating of certain proscribed foods in the traditional Jewish dietary laws. But when Mark went on to spell out the principle that "thus he [Jesus] declared all foods clean," this sounded to Matthew too much like an outright abolition of those dietary laws, and he was compelled to cut that statement in taking over the passage from Mark (15:10-20). Thus Matthew has eliminated the principal thrust of Jesus' teaching as 'recorded' in Mark on this extremely significant issue in the early Christian movement. He is motivated entirely by his own agenda and community interests, ignoring any concern over what Jesus himself might actually have taught.

In drawing on Mark's scene in which Jesus' family came to "take charge of him" because they regarded him as "out of his mind" (3:21, 31-35), Matthew ignores the latter remark as inappropriate; besides, it would contradict his own nativity scene in which Jesus' parents are made aware of their son's role in God's plan. They would hardly think him insane for undertaking a teaching ministry and performing miracles. Luke, too, has made the same cut in Mark's passage and neutered it still further.

One of Mark's most troublesome scenes, which led to amendments by all the later evangelists, was the baptism of Jesus by John in the Jordan (1:9-11). Jesus submits to it as though it were necessary, implying that he had sins to be absolved—or at least, this is how the later Gospel writers took it. Matthew inserts John's objection that he, the Baptist, ought rather to be baptized by Jesus; still, Jesus insists on it for the sake of appearances. Luke waters down the scene, slipping Jesus in for baptism "during a general baptism of the people," as though hoping the reader won't notice any inappropriate implications. This baptism is conducted by someone unknown, since John is already in prison. John finds baptism for his Jesus unacceptable in any form and he eliminates it entirely, retaining the descent of the dove as something unconnected to any ablution by

the Baptist. These kinds of redactional changes to Mark, large and small, are evident throughout the other three Gospels, and clearly spell literary dependency, along with the undeniable fact of Markan priority.

The seminal apocalyptic scene of the Gospels is the 13th chapter of Mark, in which Jesus is made to forecast the events that signal the imminent End. (Its derivation from scripture was seen in the previous chapter.) "In the same way, when you see all this happening, you may know that the end is near, at the very door. I tell you this: the present generation will live to see it all" (13:29-30). As noted earlier, Jesus' words throughout the scene suggest that it is to take place at a time somewhat *after* the Jewish War, which is one reason to date Mark toward the end of the century rather than during or immediately after the war's climax in 70 CE. But even that degree of immediacy had retreated by the time Matthew came to write, and definitely so by the time Luke came along, forcing them to alter Mark's sentiments. Matthew adds more emphasis to the need to preach the gospel of the coming kingdom to "the whole world," implying more time has been needed. Luke elsewhere in his Gospel (e.g., 17:20-25) has, in Robert Price's words (*The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man*, p.277) "toss[ed] a wet blanket over eager eschatological hopes" by having Jesus warn his disciples that their desire to see the days of the Son of Man will not be fulfilled, that much has to take place before that day arrives. As Price observes, we cannot tell what Jesus may have pronounced on this question, because "both sides put words in his mouth." Here, as in so many other cases, the evangelists have made Jesus say what they want and need him to say, with no concern for historical accuracy.

Luke's migration beyond the Jewish environs of earliest Q-based Christianity is evident in his regular put-down of the Jewish element and praise of the non-Jew. In Mark 1:40-45, Jesus cures a leper and enjoins the man not to tell anyone but to go and make an offering before a priest. In the curing of the ten lepers in Luke 17:11-19, which builds on Mark's precedent, Luke introduces a slant which often appears in his miracle stories and parables: he uses a "Samaritan" as a positive contrast to the average Jew, who is portrayed as an ingrate, conceited, or otherwise condemnable. Of the ten cured lepers, only one, a Samaritan, has the courtesy to return to Jesus and thank him. Jesus is made to drive the point home: "Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" In the famous "Good Samaritan" parable, a priest and a Levite (both Jews) ignore the robbed and half-dead traveler by the roadside, while it is a Samaritan who stops and gives aid to the unfortunate. Such attitudes on Jesus' part were introduced by a writer who had a vested interest, being in a gentile community himself, in portraying Jesus as having a more universalist outlook and sympathy than Mark contained.

Matthew went in the other direction. In curing the Syro-Phoenician woman, Mark (7:24-30) has Jesus express reluctance to cast his bounty to a Greek ("let the children first be fed, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs"—observant Jews were known to refer to gentiles as "dogs"). Mark, whose interests were not anti-gentile, had the foreign woman express her faith, that "even dogs could eat the children's crumbs under the table." For this faith Jesus heals her daughter, which is Mark's point (actually a pro-gentile one).

But Matthew takes things a little more literally—and xenophobically—adding to the pericope Jesus' stark sentiment, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matthew nevertheless relents and follows Mark's lead to cure the daughter.) Matthew has previously added a similar sentiment to his Sermon on the Mount, that one should not "give dogs what is holy" or "cast your pearls before swine." (Such language troubles Christian commentators since it seems to conflict with Jesus' alleged sympathy for the outcast.) Neither of those latter Matthean sayings appears in Luke, and he even lacks the Markan scene altogether, perhaps feeling it cannot be rescued from what he sees as a basic anti-gentile tone (although it forms part of that 'great void' in Luke on anything between Mark 6:45 and 8:10).

The point to be made here is that so much even of the character of Jesus, his outlook and dispositions, has been determined by the evangelists themselves, following their own interests. This has imputed to Jesus a whole range of diverse and often contradictory features which only serves to aid those who seek support in the Gospels for their own viewpoints and agendas. There is, after all, so much to choose from. Jesus has been able to be all things to all people because he is a *synthesis* of multiple people and the product of multiple writers. And it is why perennial scholarly attempts to recreate any "genuine Jesus" have always been doomed to failure.

Even a credible picture of the apostles is impossible to glean from the Gospels. Mark makes them thick-headed dunces, from Peter on down, who never seem to learn from experience or rise above their own crude and simple natures. (What allegorical purpose he may have intended by this is difficult to say; it is hard to think that he would have wanted his community audience to identify themselves in them.) It would be impossible to derive from such followers, as scholars have traditionally tried to do, either the sophisticated writings of the early Christian record (often in a fine Greek style), or the imagined elevation of Jesus after his death to the refined and sophisticated concept of Godhead characteristic of the early Christ cult, with all its philosophical and mythological richness, both Jewish and Greek.

Matthew improves the character of the disciples generally, softening Mark's harshness. He also elevates Peter to the status of chief assistant, one who eclipses the others, although he serves to advance the story of Jesus rather than assume a character of his own. On Peter the "rock" (Cephas) Matthew confers the ultimate privilege of forming the foundation of the "church" by Jesus' appointment. We can presume that this served some political purpose in Matthew's environment, according to whatever or whomever Peter symbolized, perhaps in the face of some rival faction. Not that we have to assume that no such person as Peter ever existed, but if he is based on a legendary and early apostle of the Christ, such as the one known to Paul, now dead for a few decades, none of the Gospel portrayals can be relied on to tell us anything accurate about him.

As late as the epistle of Barnabas, probably a couple of decades into the 2nd century, we still lack a consistent picture of the apostles. In 5:9, the author styles them "sinners of the worst kind" (lit., wicked beyond all sin), which is something more extreme than any portrayal in the Gospels (see chapter 30).

The Position of the Fourth Gospel

When we come to the Gospel of John, the situation becomes more complex. Until recently, scholars were perhaps evenly divided on the question of whether John was dependent in any way on the Synoptics. Traditionally, the preference has been to view John as a creation independent of Matthew, Mark and Luke. This is no longer sustainable.

Considering that the Johannine theology and John's teachings of Jesus are dramatically different from those of the other Gospels, which might suggest independence, one could expect that the Johannine community would also have developed a passion story uniquely its own. Yet John, too, follows the same line of footprints through the events of Jesus' trial and crucifixion as Mark does, and adds nothing new to the plot line, even if he introduces significant changes of interpretation to fit his own theology. For example, Jesus' death takes place on Passover eve, rather than on the following day as in the Synoptics, but this is not because John has inherited a different element of tradition. Most Johannine scholars are agreed it is because he wishes to play up the symbolism between the slaughter of Jesus on Calvary and the slaughter of the Passover lambs in the Temple, and so he fashions his version of the story to make the two coincide on the same day.

Another significant change is the very character of the passion itself. All suggestions of weakness on Jesus' part are eliminated. Out goes Gethsemane. There is no crucifixion of an innocent man, no atonement through suffering; John's Jesus does not suffer. The raising up on the cross is a glorification, with no tone of ignominy, no hint of agony. There is no establishment of the Eucharist as representing Jesus' body and blood, for this is not the sacrament of salvation. John's Jesus is a Revealer figure, enabling salvation by bestowing knowledge of God, which is what the Bread and Water of Life he preaches, and which he has identified with himself in symbolic fashion, constitutes.

As we have seen, this type of soteriology is akin to Gnosticism: the concept of a Revealer Son or divine force, sent by God, that bestows the envisioned gnosis/knowledge on the community: thus Jesus' constant reference to himself as sent by the Father. This original gnostic nature of the Johannine community's philosophy has survived in the character and teachings of the Johannine Jesus, but it has been wedded in awkward alliance to the crucifixion element, which John has been forced to render quite differently than the Synoptics do. It is little wonder that the Roman Church treated the Gospel with considerable suspicion, until it undertook to introduce some orthodox-leaning elements, probably a little after 150.

John takes other liberties which cannot possibly be accepted at face value: the piercing of Jesus' side by the soldier at the cross, placing Jesus' mother Mary at its foot, an extended exchange with Pilate where the other Gospels have Jesus silent, a dramatic raising of Lazarus after four days in the tomb, bringing Jesus to Jerusalem three times in the course of his ministry, for three Passovers—all things unknown to the other evangelists. These must be regarded as John's own literary creations, devoid of any historical or traditional basis.

Some of them are midrashically motivated, notably the piercing of Jesus' side. Not only does it reflect Zechariah 12:10 (as John himself points out): "They shall look upon him whom they have pierced," it serves as a substitute for the usual breaking of the legs to hasten death, since this would go against several passages in scripture about bones not being broken, which John has chosen to apply to his Jesus (as Exodus 12:46, Numbers 9:12).

One of the traditional arguments for Johannine dependency is the handling of the denial by Peter. In a device known as "intercalation," Mark has a habit throughout his Gospel of sandwiching two parts of one anecdote around an intervening anecdote. The two interact to emphasize some point Mark is trying to make. In his passion story, the denial by Peter is split into two parts. The joint scene begins with 14:53-54:

Then they led Jesus away to the High Priest's house, where the chief priests, elders, and doctors of the law were all assembling. Peter followed him at a distance right into the High Priest's courtyard; and there he remained, sitting among the attendants, warming himself at the fire. [NEB]

Mark then shifts his attention from Peter to Jesus and goes through the interrogation of Jesus by the Sanhedrin and the exchange with the High Priest (14:55-65). That done, he returns to Peter and continues with the account of his denial (14:66-72) "three times before the cock crew." In this way, Mark has contrasted Peter's fear of persecution which leads him to deny any relationship to Jesus, with Jesus' own fearless admission that he is the Messiah and Son of God, for which he receives a death sentence.

And what does John do? He too divides the denial scene by inserting the High Priest's questioning of Jesus into the middle. In this case, he makes the break between Peter's first denial and the other two (18:15-27). That he would have done this by coincidence is thought so unlikely as to be rejected. The only conclusion to be drawn is that John depends on Mark for his passion story.

Another indicator of John's dependency is the fact that he is clearly *reacting* to things in the Synoptics he does not like and making his own preferred changes to them. He rejected the Gethsemane scene because it spelled weakness on Jesus' part; we know this because he makes it clear by placing a direct repudiation of it in Jesus' mouth. Acknowledging that the hour has come for his glorification on the cross, Jesus says (12:27): "Should I say, Father save me from this hour? [No,] for it was for this purpose that I came to this hour!" And again in 18:11: "The cup the Father has given me: shall I not drink it?" It's all a slap in the Synoptic face for their poor grace in portraying Jesus as having doubts and asking God, even if only momentarily, to remove the cup of suffering he is about to face.

John similarly repudiates the meek silence attributed to Jesus in the Synoptics (determined by scripture) when abused by the Sanhedrin. Instead, he has Jesus make defiant retorts, fearless in the face of pain and imminent ordeal. Nor does he require, through weakness, the aid of Simon of Cyrene on his way to Calvary. John makes sure to tell the reader (19:17) that Jesus "carried the cross by himself."

But Johannine dependence on Synoptic precedents is evident not only in the passion story, but throughout the Gospel. Here is an example worth examining in detail, and we can bring in Matthew to show how he, too, has changed Mark. The scene began life in Mark, with a question posed and an answer by Jesus. Both Matthew and John did not like the implications of that exchange and proceeded to alter it. (Luke was apparently not bothered by it and simply copied Mark.) Here I will lay out in schematic fashion what Robert Price discusses in *The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man*, p.227-8. First, the three versions of the question, followed by the three versions of the answer.

The Question:

Mark 10:17 - "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Matthew 19:16 - "Teacher what good thing must I do to have eternal life?"

John 3:2 - "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from god; for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him."

The Answer:

Mark 10:18 - "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments..."

Matthew 19:17 - "Why do you ask me about what is good? One there is who is good. If you would enter (eternal) life, keep the commandments."

John 3:3 - Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

If one looks at the Markan question followed by the Markan answer, one sees that Jesus seems to be declaring that he is not good. Matthew elected to rework the question so as to transfer the idea of "good" from Jesus to the thing required. Thus, the answer by Jesus, also reworked by Matthew, avoids any necessity for Mark's objectionable response. It also makes that answer a bit incoherent, as it is entirely superfluous. Why would Jesus ask "Why do you ask me about what is good?" It's obvious: the questioner wants to know what good must be done to gain eternal life. And by sticking in "One there is who is good," namely God, Matthew has further added a complete non-sequitur. What does this now have to do with anything? It is simply Matthew's quite typical adherence to his Markan source. He would rather rework Mark's words than cut them entirely. Jesus' pertinent part of the answer remains the same: keep the commandments.

When we get to John, he too has sought to eliminate Mark's objectionable feature. But he does not merely rework Mark's question, he eliminates it entirely. Not only has the idea of "good" disappeared, the speaker does not even ask a question! And yet, Jesus proceeds to give an answer. To what? Obviously, to the original question asked by Mark: how do I gain eternal life? The answer is also changed from the Mark-Matthew one, since John has different ideas of the process by which one gains eternal life. But that this Johannine exchange is dependent on the Synoptic original cannot be doubted. John is answering Mark's question. It is a literary reworking, not something that John has garbled through his reception of a tradition; the change is completely faithful to his own agenda.

The same is clear of Matthew, who in other places betrays the same sensitivity to Mark's cruder handling of Jesus—and the same sort of careful

amendment. That displacement of the word "good" and the problem it solves is patently obvious as a deliberate redaction of the Markan precedent. In both Matthew and John, the working of the internal gears is fully audible. (Price notes that John's new answer may well have been inspired by Mark's saying of Jesus a couple of verses earlier, in 10:15: "Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it," though John has inserted his "born again" idea into Mark's saying.)

Because the nature of Jesus' teachings in John is vastly different from those of the Synoptics, this too has had an effect on the portrayal of Jesus' personality. Gone is any Jesus meek and mild, compassionate, persuadable, sometimes modest. He has been so elevated by John, so self-oriented in his message, there is no humanity left. Rather than preach the Kingdom, Jesus preaches himself, the sole avenue to the Father with whom he is continuous. He is a two-dimensional cardboard character. We get no sense of a real person behind the pompous billboard of "I am..." slogans. Once again, we can derive no insight into the character of Jesus as a possible historical person from the Gospel of John, and John himself shows no concern whatever with providing us with such.

Indeed, we are led to consider that even with the Gospel of John, Jesus may still be regarded as a symbolic character. When one views the deletion of scenes like the Baptism, Gethsemane and the establishment of the Eucharist, one has to wonder how the writer could have expected his readers not to be upset at their disappearance. If key episodes like this were based on tradition, if they were at all historical, they would surely have been familiar to some of John's readership, as would many of Jesus' Synoptic teachings and miracles. John would have had a lot of explaining to do for the liberties he had taken and the wholesale slashing of root and stock in the rich garden of Jesus traditions which should have been thriving by this time across the Christian landscape. Of course, the non-Gospel record shows that these things were in fact still far from well known.

It all points to the same telling conclusion. We do not have multiple independent corroborative versions of the story of Jesus, of the life that is supposed to lie at the genesis of the Christian faith. All we have is *one* story, *one* version, *one* pattern of incidents, developing in an evolving chain of literary adaptation from a single literary source. This picture comes even more sharply into focus as we return to the climax of that story, the passion of Jesus, the alleged central historical event of Christianity.

An Unknown Event

We will see in a moment that this story is entirely dependent on a culling from scripture of large-scale motifs and small individual passages which have been spliced together to create a narrative. Thus neither the overall shape nor the events themselves would seem to be grounded in a remembered history. A number of scholars have recently put forward a scenario to explain such a state of affairs.¹⁶³

This scenario allows that most, perhaps virtually all, of the passion account in the four Gospels does not reflect what actually happened. The genuine historical details of what transpired at Jesus' trial and execution are assumed not to have

survived in Christian consciousness, probably because they were not witnessed or learned about by his followers. Instead, the Jerusalem community created a narrative framework for the event of Jesus' death by drawing on scriptural passages mostly from the Psalms and Prophets, stringing them together to create a tale which could be told and transmitted through oral tradition, one that would reflect, through its scriptural make-up, traditional motifs and understandings for a new Jewish faith.

Those scholars have been forced to this conclusion because virtually every detail of the Gospel passion story can be shown to have a parallel in scripture, and because even the intermediate and large-scale structures of the account are scripturally determined. Also, no other details outside this scripture-based account surface anywhere in Christian tradition from that point on. They assume, therefore, that nothing concrete was known about Jesus' death.

Crossan has said (*The Birth of Christianity*, p.521):

If there were, from the beginning, a detailed passion-resurrection story or even just a passion narrative, I would expect more evidence of it than is currently extant. It is totally absent from the Life Tradition [the "Galilean" side] and it appears in the Death Tradition [the "Jerusalem" side] as follows. On the one hand, outside of the gospels, there are no references to those details of the passion narrative. If all Christians knew them, why do no other Christians mention them? On the other hand, within the gospels, everyone else copies directly or indirectly from Mark. If one story was established early as history remembered, why do all not "copy" from it rather than depend on Mark? Why do Matthew and Luke have to rely so completely on Mark? Why does John, despite his profound theological innovation, depend so completely on synoptic information?

A number of evident objections offer themselves to the theory that no details were known about the passion, throwing early Christians onto scripture for information.

(1) Can "oral tradition" function and survive in such a framework? Does a preacher-prophet "tell" of an historical event to his own or his listeners' satisfaction by giving it an entirely scriptural content? If the speaker is preaching to a group of potential converts, does he communicate the details of Jesus' passion with a proviso at each step of the way: "Now, the gambling for Jesus' clothes at the foot of the cross, that too didn't really happen—that's from Psalm 22." How would the listener, especially a gentile, adjust to this kind of preaching and 'tradition' and how would he in turn pass it on to others?

(2) Why, in fact, would no details of the historical event of Jesus' death be known and added to those oral traditions, so that something other than scripture would show up in the passion account? Raymond E. Brown (*The Death of the Messiah*, p. 14-15) has called it "absurd" to think that some information, some historical raw material, was not available, or could not be obtained by Jesus' followers after his death. Such a thought is certainly intuitive. And yet the entire narrative can be broken down into echoes of scripture alone. That includes all the details *preceding* the time of Jesus' arrest, when the disciples were not yet

separated from him. Why are the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, the Last Supper, the Garden of Gethsemane, the arrest itself—namely, the part of the passion account when Christian witnesses were supposedly still on the scene—why are they equally saturated with scripture and just as lacking in hard historical material as the trial and crucifixion portions?

(3) If not even the basics were known, how could that death have made such an impact that people would feel impelled to set it in scripture? What would have captured the imagination of preachers and believers across the empire if no historical circumstances of Jesus' death were known? What could have been the fuel that launched this amazing response to Jesus in Jerusalem—especially since his teachings apparently made no impact there? Who would have noticed or cared if some simple Galilean peasant had come into the city with a few followers, done a bit of preaching, only to be quickly seized and executed by the combined authorities under unknown circumstances? Who would have been so overwhelmed by this event that they immediately ransacked scripture to create a story about him, delved into the full range of Greek and Jewish philosophy about intermediary forces between God and humanity, and turned this humble peasant teacher into the equivalent of the Logos and personified Wisdom? Who would have made him creator and sustainer of the universe and regarded that obscure death as the redemptive moment of God's salvation history?

Even if this scenario had merit, it founders on another consideration. If the actual historical details of Jesus' death were unknown and Christians were forced to go to scripture to articulate that event, *why*, among all the Christian communities spread across the empire, did only one of them, perhaps only a single person, decide to do such a thing—and then only after several decades had passed? Why did no other Christian groups, other exegetes, feel the need for some articulation of that unknown event? Why did the forces which impelled Mark to construct a midrashic story from scripture not operate in other locales, producing other tales of the passion which would inevitably have been quite different?

The inescapable conclusion would seem to be that no event of Jesus' death took place at Christianity's inception, and only with the construction from scripture of the first narrative of a Jesus of Nazareth, which the movement eventually adopted as history, was such an idea let loose in the world.

The Suffering and Vindication of the Innocent Righteous One

Apart from its many details which have been extracted from widely separated passages in scripture, the passion narrative as a whole follows a known generic model. That is, there is a type, or genre, of tale found throughout centuries of Jewish writing, both biblical and apocryphal, which bears a strong resemblance to the story of Mark's Jesus.

This tale tells of a righteous individual who is conspired against and falsely accused, who remains obedient to God and puts trust in him, who undergoes trial and suffering, finally to be condemned to death. Usually at the last moment, God intervenes miraculously to rescue the protagonist and he or she is vindicated, shown to have been innocent of the charge. Finally, as a reward for the ordeal,

the innocent one is raised or restored to a high position at court or in the community, and the adversaries are discredited. In later versions of the tale, the protagonist actually suffers death, but is exalted in Heaven after death.

A detailed comparison of this type of tale with the well-known story of Jesus' passion is hardly necessary, though we will follow its course in the latter part of this chapter. Suffice to say that virtually every element of it is mirrored in the plot line of Mark's passion account.

This literary model is found in the Joseph narrative in Genesis 39-41, in the Book of Esther 3, in Tobit 1:18-22, Susanna, Daniel 3 and 6, 3 Maccabees 3, 2 Maccabees 7 and the Wisdom of Solomon 2-5. The latter two involve exaltation after death, to which we might add the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53, though this last does not contain the usual narrative elements present in the genre. All seem to be derived from an archetypal tale in pagan tradition called the Story of Ahiqar, which is at least as old as the 5th century BCE.

George Nickelsburg, in an influential article in the *Harvard Theological Review*, "The Genre and Function of the Markan Passion Narrative" (No.73 [1980] p.153-184), first laid out this genre and its components as the model for the passion story in Mark, and it has since become a commonplace to draw attention to it. Scholars refer to it as The Suffering and Vindication of the Innocent Righteous One.

Burton Mack, in *A Myth of Innocence* (p.262-68), focuses on other critical factors that must be taken into account, further supporting the contention that Mark's Gospel is a literary construction and not a record of tradition. One is that major themes Mark has introduced into the body of the Gospel, such as the plot against Jesus, the question of Jesus' identity and the various titles given to him in the course of his ministry, the anti-temple outlook, the failure of the disciples to understand, all these themes come to a climax and are resolved only during the passion. This literary shaping and interrelationship among the various narrative threads of the Gospel could not have been a product of oral transmission; such things can result only from careful construction at the hands of a skilled writer. Similarly within the passion narrative itself, so many details serve to build up a plot structure which works only on paper. As Mack points out, these cannot survive and be transmitted as independent stories or traditions, because they make sense only in the context of the constructed passion narrative as a whole.

But that "narrative as a whole" could not have existed before Mark, not only because there is no evidence for it in the wider record, but because its literary integrity is founded on the biblical model, and the details of that narrative have been extracted from scriptural passages.

We are led once more to the conclusion that the events which began Christianity, as envisioned by nineteen centuries of Christian believers and world onlookers, are the product of one author, and had no existence until they took shape and came together on Mark's writing table.

We can now follow the tale recounted in Mark's midrashic construction, as he draws on motifs and passages from the Hebrew bible (equivalent to the Christian Old Testament).

Opening Scene

The passion story proper occupies Chapters 14 and 15 of the Gospel of Mark but the sequence of events begins with Jesus' arrival at Jerusalem. This is the climax of the ministry Mark has created for his Jesus, and so the entry into the city must be given some drama. Jesus directs two disciples to go to a nearby village where they will find a tethered colt, which they are to bring to him. This they do, and Jesus rides on the colt into the city, while bystanders carpet the road with cloaks and branches (palms) from nearby trees, some shouting "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

An historical scene? Turn to the prophet Zechariah, 9:9:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass.

An earlier verse, 2:10, declares a similar idea: "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion; for lo, I come and I will dwell in the midst of you, says the Lord." Another prophetic passage also urges rejoicing, Zephaniah 3:14: "Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!...The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst." Mark has turned these passages into the reaction of the crowd as Jesus enters the city, mounted on Zechariah's donkey. And what do they shout? A verse from Psalm 118 (verse 26a in the Septuagint wording): "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

In perfect midrashic fashion, Mark has combined the ideas of all these passages and sculpted a narrative scene in which the disciples acquire the donkey, Jesus rides it into the city and the crowds rejoice and hail him, spreading palms worthy of a dignitary, even a king.

Matthew carries things even further. When he reworks Mark (21:1-5) he has the disciples bring back both a donkey *and* her colt. Why? Because the above passage in Zechariah could be read as referring to two separate animals. (It's actually a common trademark of traditional Jewish writing, a poetic repetition of a single idea.) Exactly how Jesus can ride both is never illustrated, but Matthew is anxious to point out that all this is in fulfillment of the words of the prophet, and he quotes Zechariah directly.

Cleansing the Temple

A few verses later, Mark gives us a dramatic scene in the Temple (11:15-17), where Jesus overturns the tables of the money-changers and pigeon-sellers, and bars passage through the Temple court. That such an event could have happened as Mark portrays it is virtually impossible. The outer court of the Temple was huge, and Jesus single-handedly could never have accomplished that degree of interference with Temple traffic. Nor could he have done it with impunity, for Jewish and Roman authorities were constantly in attendance. The Roman military garrison overlooked the Temple court. Jesus calls the traders "thieves," but their activities were essential to the functioning of the Temple. It was they who made the public sacrifices possible. There was no thievery about it.

The scene is built on scriptural passages. Malachi 3:1: "The Lord whom you seek will come to his Temple." Hosea 9:15: "Because of their evil deeds I will drive them from my house" (although Hosea was not talking about animal sellers). Zechariah 14:21: "When that time comes, no trader shall be seen in the house of the Lord of hosts."

As for his condemnation of those traders, Jesus offers a quotation followed by his own comment. Both are from scripture. Isaiah 56:7 is placed in Jesus' mouth as a challenge: "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations." His follow-up thought is Jeremiah 7:11: "Do you think that this house...is a robbers' cave?" Again, Jeremiah is not talking about traders in the Temple, but those who commit atrocities and make sacrifices to Baal and then come into Yahweh's Temple expecting to gain forgiveness. One of the features of the practice of midrash is that the context from which a passage is borrowed is never taken into consideration. Most times, if not all, the old context bears no relation to the new one which Mark creates for it.

This incident fits one of the key elements in the larger story pattern about the Suffering Righteous One. (Nickelsburg calls them "generic components.") This one is the "Provocation" component which induces the protagonist's enemies to act against him. Mark 11:18 spells it out: "The chief priests and doctors of the law heard of this and sought some way of making away with him."

This motif Mark continues to emphasize. "They began to look for a way to arrest him" (12:12). "The chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth, and kill him" (14:1). This is the "Conspiracy" element of the story pattern, and even here, the idea has specific connection with the Psalms. "Those who wish me dead defame me," says Psalm 38:12. "My enemies' rancor bursts upon me," says Psalm 71:10. And so on.¹⁶⁴

A Night of Betrayal

Mark brings the Conspiracy element to an inspired and insidious focus. The greatest conspirator of all is one whom the evangelist places next to Jesus himself, in the midst of his closest followers. The figure of Judas is undoubtedly one of the most powerful creations of world fiction, and probably none has had such terrible consequence. For two millennia, and almost single-handedly, he served to inflame Christian hatred of his race, for Judas was designed by Mark to represent the evangelist's view of the Jews as cold-hearted and duplicitous. It is only with the late 20th century that Christian authority has pulled back in shame from that history of anti-Semitism, and Christian scholarship has come to the belated conclusion that Judas himself was probably an invention of Mark.

What scriptural passages might have spurred Mark's portrayal of Judas? Obadiah 7: "Your confederates mislead you and bring you low, your own kith and kin lay a snare for your feet." Psalm 41:9 says: "Even the friend whom I trusted, who ate at my table, has lifted up his heel against me." Psalm 55:12-13 laments over the friend and comrade who taunted the psalmist as though he were an enemy. Psalm 109 does the same over "the wicked and deceitful mouths (that) are opened against me," who attack without cause, returning evil for good, hatred for love. If Mark was familiar with the Pauline myth of the Lord's Supper

(1 Cor. 11:23-26) with its "on the night he was delivered up," he may have decided to turn that neutral "handing over" (which Paul imputes to God) into Judas' act of "betrayal." Most modern translators of the Pauline passage have been willing to go along.

And Judas' price? Mark says only that the chief priests promised to give him money. Matthew is more specific (26:15). In his own survey of scripture he has lighted on Zechariah 11:12: "And they weighed out as my wages thirty shekels of silver." But the dissatisfied prophet, at God's suggestion, rejected the shekels and "cast them into the treasury in the house of the Lord." Matthew uses this as part of his scene of Judas' remorse and suicide (27:3-5) in which the betrayer "threw the money down in the Temple."

A Last Meal

Mark's creation of the Last Supper is undoubtedly more than simple midrash. If he is part of a community which has a communal, sacred meal—which seems likely—and if he knows the Pauline myth of the Lord's Supper, such elements would have contributed to the scene of the twelve apostles gathered about Jesus for a final repast. (In the Synoptics it is the Passover meal, though not in John who has moved it up a day). But the concept of a new covenant established by Jesus would have required parallels to the scene of the old covenant established by Moses, as recounted in Exodus. Moses' words in 24:8, "This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you," would have governed Jesus' words at the Supper: "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many." Jesus himself is the blood sacrifice corresponding to Moses' animal sacrifice. (The Epistle to the Hebrews makes that connection as well, but fails to offer any scene or words of Jesus establishing the new covenant at a last supper.)

Jesus concludes the meal with the statement that he will not drink (wine) again "until I drink it new in the kingdom of God," a declaration of trust in Isaiah 25:6: "On this mountain the Lord will prepare a banquet of rich fare for all the peoples, a banquet of wines..."

From there, Jesus proceeds to Gethsemane and his ordeal begins.

Doubts and Agony

There are many finely-wrought elements to this simple scene, a piece of subtle crafting which places Mark in the ranks of the greatest writers of all time. Gethsemane's three-part structure, the contrast between the starkly agonizing Jesus and the oblivious, sleeping disciples, the inbuilt anticipation of the passion itself and the looming arrest, not to mention the various moral "lessons" Mark manages to convey about loyalty, obedience to God, a willingness to suffer for the faith, and much more—nothing could better illustrate the power and necessity of myth in the context of religious belief and commitment. Christianity owes its two-thousand year whirlwind career to the literary genius of Mark. Without Mark's creation, Paul and the Christ cult he spent his life preaching would have vanished into the sunken pits of fossilized history.

"How deep I am cast in misery, groaning in my distress," the writer of Psalm 42 (v.5) laments. Other psalmists had poured out their own expressions of

misery: "I cry...but get no answer" (22:2); "Deliver me from the sword, my life from the axe" (22:20); "I am in distress and my eyes are dimmed with grief" (31:9). Mark had much inspiration to draw from his scriptural well.

Luke, who for some reason trashed Mark's scene and destroyed every touch of poetry in it, took a line from Psalm 22:14 (LXX), "I am poured out like water," and turned it into a garish image of Jesus sweating drops of blood into the ground. Matthew in his own Gethsemane scene adhered closely to Mark. John, on the other hand, discarded the whole thing, as part of his sanitization of the Synoptic Jesus. The ability to feel human emotions like anguish and doubt was the last thing he wished to grant to his own glorified divine Christ.

The Gethsemane scene, besides filling a dramatic role in Mark's unfolding passion story, is one of those "generic components" in the tale of the Righteous One, representing the motif of "Obedience" to God. Though Jesus, expressing the human side of his composite nature, asks in a moment of weakness that the terrible cup should pass him by, he sets aside those fears and tells his Father: "Yet not what I wish for, but what you wish of me." It was a line that would inspire centuries of Christian martyrs and faltering believers. Indeed, we can be sure that Mark invented it as a symbolic lesson that believers ought to be willing to suffer and die, even in the face of their own fears.

Judas arrives to fill his role as betrayer through a kiss, a plot device which has never made sense to those who regard it as history rather than symbolism. The rest of the apostles give in to their own fears and flee the scene, leaving Jesus to face his fate alone. An incident like this is often held up as an example of a tradition which must be factual, since it is an embarrassing one. Why would the church, indeed the disciples themselves, want to invent such a shameful incident? Of course, in the context of Mark's midrashic piece of symbolism, echoing scripture and serving to convey lessons for the community, such a rationale does not apply; the disciples of his story had nothing to say about what might have been embarrassing to them. Moreover, their action was determined by Zechariah 13:7: "Strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered."¹⁶⁵

As the disciples flee, Mark adds two enigmatic verses (14:51-52): "Among those following was a young man with nothing on but a linen cloth. They tried to seize him; but he slipped out of the linen cloth and ran away naked."

This detail has intrigued and baffled commentators for centuries. Who was this young man? What was the significance of making this brief mention of him? One recent scholar went so far as to build upon it a theory that Jesus belonged to some clandestine homosexual group, and this was Mark's subtle revelation of it (as if he alone would have been party to a juicy bit of scandal like that, several decades after the fact).

The real explanation is very likely much less sensational. Amos 2:16 (LXX) says: "And the strong will find no confidence in power; the naked shall flee away in that day, saith the Lord." Mark's young nude is not worked into the plot in any way, or even identified as a disciple. He is simply a faceless appendage representing the Amos verse regarded as a prophecy. Even scriptural elements useless to the tale could be included in an account in which history demanded no voice.

Surrounded by Enemies

Why did the gentiles rage, and the peoples plot futile things?
 The kings of the earth stand ready, and the rulers conspire together
 Against the Lord and his Anointed.

Psalm 2 is a Coronation Hymn, and verses such as these (1-2) reflect the unfortunate situation in which Israel historically found herself, standing at a geographical crossroads between all the great empires of the Near East. Putting on a brave face and regarding God as ready and able to protect his Chosen (if only they would obey him properly) was often the only recourse the nation had. A Jesus surrounded by his enemies—the Jewish "people" and their religious leaders, Herod, one of the "kings of the earth" (though really only a Tetrarch) and Pilate the "ruler" (a governor, but virtually absolute in Judea)—is a situation which echoes the sentiments of Psalm 2.

The first of those enemies is the Jewish Sanhedrin, before which Jesus is brought. From this point on, the Psalms become the major source for many of Mark's details, none more so than Psalm 22. The Septuagint version of verse 16 reads: "Synagogues (*synagoge*, assemblies) of the wicked have circled me round." Jesus is not only encircled by hostile chief priests, elders, scribes, the entire Council and the High Priest—just about every Jewish authority Mark can squeeze onto the stage—he is accused of trumped-up, contradictory charges (Mk. 14:55-60).

The Psalms are full of such sentiments about persecution. "Liars give evidence against me" (27:12); "Malicious witnesses arose" (35:11); "Wicked men heap calumnies upon me" (109:2); and several others. This is the "Accusation" component of the generic tale. The conspirators accuse the hero within the context of another component: the "Trial." In Mark, Jesus undergoes two trials. As in that opening verse of Psalm 2, both the gentile and the Jew must be involved. Luke adds a kind of third trial, in the form of Jesus' interview with Herod (23:6-12), although this is almost a friendly affair to satisfy Herod's curiosity. Crossan (in *The Cross that Spoke*) thinks it may have been included to give more graphic representation to the second line of Psalm 2: Herod is a "king" and he "conspires" with Pilate.

Trial by Jew and Gentile

In both trials, Mark introduces the motif found in Psalm 39:9: "I am dumb, I will not open my mouth." Psalm 38:13-14 sounds the same sentiments: "I am like a dumb man who cannot open his mouth. I behave like a man who cannot hear and whose tongue offers no defense." To the High Priest's trumped-up accusations (Mk. 14:60), Jesus "was silent and made no answer." And in the subsequent hearing before Pilate, Mark reiterates (15:5) that "to Pilate's astonishment, Jesus made no further reply." John, on the other hand, was not willing to keep his Jesus silent, and he crafted a lengthy and subtle discussion between Jesus and Pilate on the question of kingdoms and truth.

To the High Priest's questioning about who Jesus is, however, Mark has Jesus break his silence to make a capsule declaration, dependent on Psalm 110

("You shall sit at my right hand") and Daniel 7:13 ("coming with the clouds of heaven"). Between the question and the answer (14:61b-62), Mark manages to work in all three titles that have been applied to Jesus throughout the course of the Gospel—two of them accepted only reluctantly by Jesus. Now there is no holding back. Yes, Jesus is Messiah, and Son of God, and Son of Man. That is sufficient to bring down on him the charge of blasphemy and the judgment that he should be put to death. Whether such a declaration did indeed merit the charge and judgment has been debated in scholarship for some time. But neither these words, nor the entire scene, warrant such considerations. Mark and his community are laying claim to the symbolic significance of these titles. If the end of the world is indeed at hand, the sectarian group must regard itself as being at the center of all those expectations.

Both trials entail the component of "Condemnation," but the answer to the High Priest allows Mark to look ahead and provide the ultimate example of the all-important component of "Vindication." Like the later versions of the generic tale, Jesus' vindication will come after his death at the anticipated Parousia, when as the Son of Man he will be seen "seated on the right hand of God and coming with the clouds of heaven" (14:62).

Only in Matthew does Pilate wash his hands, mirroring a few Psalm references to hand washing, as well as Deuteronomy 21:6-8: "Elders shall wash their hands...and declare 'Our hands did not shed this blood'." Finally, Jesus is delivered up for execution.

Abuse and Suffering

In the biblical tale, the hero is subjected to an "Ordeal" leading to death or the threat of death. Before his crucifixion, Jesus is first scourged and mistreated. While there are general references in Isaiah and the Psalms to being "abused by all men" (Ps.22:6) or "despised and rejected" (Isa. 53:3), each particular element of the Markan abuse has a scriptural precedent.

Isaiah 50:6-7: "I offered my back to the lash...I did not hide my face from spitting and insult." Pilate has Jesus flogged (15:15), and the soldiers spit on him (15:19), as the members of the Sanhedrin had earlier done (14:65). Micah 5:1 declares that "with a rod they strike upon the cheek the ruler of Israel," and so Mark has the soldiers "beat him about the head with a reed" (15:19). For other features of the abuse, Mark has looked to the Day of Atonement ritual of the two goats. The crown of thorns has been suggested by the thread of crimson wool laid on the head of the scapegoat. Dressing Jesus in a royal robe may reflect a further image of the red wool, though Crossan (*The Cross That Spoke*, p. 128) thinks it "an allusion to Zechariah 3:1-5, an eschatological vision in which the high priest Joshua (Jesus!) has his filthy clothes removed and is robed instead with the sacerdotal garments."

Crucifixion

An earlier chapter pointed out the scriptural passages about "nailing" and "piercing" which would have suggested to Paul that the spiritual Christ had undergone crucifixion in the higher world. Zechariah 12:10, "They shall look

upon him whom they have pierced," and Psalm 22:16, "They have pierced my hands and my feet." Mark translates the "hanging on a tree" in the mythical realm into the cross mounted on the hill of Calvary outside Jerusalem. On the way to that execution, the evangelist introduces a memorable character, Simon of Cyrene, who helps an exhausted Jesus carry his cross. Generations of sermons focusing on this character more than justify Mark's intention here, to convey the lesson that Christians must share in the cross of Christ and help each other through adversity. While no scriptural passages readily suggest themselves as inspiration for this feature, it does reflect a frequent element within the tale's biblical model. There, various good-hearted people make an attempt to aid the hero, usually to no avail.

Once the crucifixion scene is under way, the text is thick with scriptural building blocks. Jesus' placement between two thieves is governed by Isaiah 53:12, "And he was numbered with the transgressors." The role of the two co-crucified is enlarged by later evangelists. Mark simply mentions them. Matthew adds that one taunted Jesus. Luke supplies an exchange between them, giving us the "good" and the "bad" thief, the former welcomed into paradise by Jesus. (Price points out that Jesus' words, "This day shalt thou be with me in paradise" make no room for lying dead for three days or resurrecting to earth for forty more.) This is more literary reworking of earlier Markan invention.

Mark's passers-by hurl abuse at Jesus: "And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads, and saying... 'save yourself, and come down from the cross!'" Psalm 22:7-8 provides all three elements: "All who see me jeer at me, make mouths at me and wag their heads: 'He threw himself on the Lord for rescue; let the Lord save him'." Matthew, ever the stickler when it comes to scripture, adds (27:43) the specific thought in the Psalm's last phrase: "Let God deliver him now, if he wants him."

At the foot of the cross the soldiers gamble for Jesus' garments (15:24). Psalm 22:18 reads: "They divided my garments among them and for my raiments they cast lots." Here, too, is another example of poetic repetition (although Matthew did not try to reflect it in two different dice throws).

From the cross, Jesus makes his anguished cry to God, a quote of the first verse of the ubiquitous Psalm 22: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The generic tale often features a "Prayer" by the hero for deliverance or for vengeance. Mark allows Jesus to express neither of these hopes, but Luke's sentiment is more than appropriate: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit," a line from Psalm 31:5. In response to the cry in Mark, Jesus is offered vinegar to drink. Psalm 69:21 speaks of the psalmist receiving poison for food, "and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." Only John addresses the question of the breaking of Jesus' legs—a regular practice in crucifixion—but it is to deny (19:33) that this was done, and perhaps the silence about this practice in the Synoptics is determined by the same need. Jesus' legs cannot be broken because there were too many 'interdictions' in the writings. Exodus 12:46 specifies that "You must not break a bone of (the paschal lamb)." Similarly, Numbers 9:12. Psalm 34:20 is adamant: "He guards every bone of his body, and not one of them is broken."

Reactions

While Jesus is still hanging on the cross, waiting to die, nature begins to react. Mark 15:33: "At midday darkness fell over the whole land which lasted until the ninth hour [three in the afternoon]." No record of such a phenomenon is to be found in the ancient world. Rather, its occurrence is to be located on the pages of the prophet Amos. In forecasting the Day of the Lord, he declares the word of God (8:9): "I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight." (We will look further at this phenomenon of nature when considering Christian reports on the lost historians Thallus and Phlegon.)

When Jesus finally dies, further prodigies occur. The temple veil is torn in two from top to bottom, no doubt a symbol of God's displeasure with Israel and the passing away of the Temple's religious supremacy. Matthew adds an earthquake, drawing from the prophet Joel (2:10): "Before them the earth shakes, the heavens shudder..." To which Joel has also added "...sun and moon are darkened, and the stars forbear to shine," another midrashic element supporting the darkness at noon motif. These prodigies are signs of God's reaction and thus of the element of "Vindication."

But the reactions include human ones as well. Mark has the centurion at the cross declare (15:39) that "Truly, this man was (the) Son of God." While Mark is conveying a lesson here about faith and who possesses it, he is also providing the final components in the tale of the Suffering Righteous One: "Reaction" and "Acclamation." Bystanders and enemies marvel at what has taken place, and often praise the hero. The latter admit that they were wrong, as in the Wisdom of Solomon 5:4-5: "Fools that we were... he is one of the Sons of God."

Matthew is guilty of one of the most ludicrous responses to Jesus' death, in the resurrection of corpses from graves opened by the earthquake (27:53). He apparently felt no squeamishness about the specter of such walking undead in the streets of Jerusalem, where the reaction of its citizens he records as merely one of 'seeing' them. It is not simply a case of no other source recording such a bizarre event or of anyone not being concerned about what happened to the risen corpses afterwards. (Did they live on for a time and go back to their former lives?) We have to wonder at Matthew's own integrity in inventing an outlandish element like this and not worrying about what would have been thought of it by those who would surely have found good reason to be skeptical. It points once again to the basic non-historicity of any of the evangelists' intentions.

Burial & Rising

Jesus had to be buried that evening, for Deuteronomy 21:22-23 prescribed that "(the hanged man's) body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but you shall bury him the same day." Joseph of Arimathea, who petitions Pilate for the body of Jesus and lays him in a tomb, is another Markan invention to further the plot line. Jesus had to be buried by his friends so that they would have access to the tomb and witness his resurrection. It is interesting to see how successive evangelists handle the character of Joseph of Arimathea. If he was a member of the Sanhedrin, then according to Mark the decision of that body the night before was to condemn Jesus, and it was said to be a unanimous one (14:64). How to

explain the change of heart? Luke rather lamely has him absent for that meeting. Matthew, not really answering the problem created by Mark, renders him a disciple of Jesus. John, unlike Luke, also makes him a disciple but says that it was secretly, for fear of his countrymen. These are clearly literary amendments having nothing to do with any perceived or varied traditions. (One of the telltale marks of this sort of thing is the common situation that amendments tend to get more elaborate in the order in which the Gospels containing them were written.)

For plot purposes, Mark also invented the characters of Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome. They serve only to witness Mark's empty tomb, but once come to life on his pages they take on an ever expanding role in the later Gospels as witnesses to the risen Jesus himself. There is no sign of such women in the wider record of the 1st century.

Matthew is the only evangelist to introduce guards at the tomb. Perhaps he felt that one evident objection to his story could be that without such a guard, the followers of Jesus might be accused of having stolen the body. That is in fact the rationale he supplies in the text (27:62-66). However, Matthew may still have been influenced by scripture in his fashioning of the scene. Price points out (*op.cit.*, p.337) that the tale of the three Israelites cast into the fiery furnace by Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 3:18f) has a few similar motifs: attending guards and a sealed door and casualties among the guards. The Gospel of Peter also has an elaborate "guard at the tomb" scene, and these guards witness the actual resurrection of Jesus, a feature which no canonical evangelist supplies.

Jesus' rising from the tomb is also a sign of his Vindication and Exaltation. It fulfills a scriptural "prophecy" of Hosea (6:1-2):

Come, let us return to the Lord, for he has torn us and will heal us, he has struck us and he will bind up our wounds; after two days he will revive us, on the third day he will restore us, that in his presence we may live.

The tale of Jonah also contains a similar motif: "For three days and three nights (Jonah) remained in the fish's belly" (1:17). From there he prayed, "Thou didst bring me up alive from the pit, O Lord my God," and God fulfilled the prophecy by having the fish spew Jonah out.

As noted earlier, most early Christian witness outside the Gospels reveals no concept of Jesus rising from the dead to spend time on earth. In fact, just about everyone writes as though Jesus simply ascended to heaven immediately after death. What is Mark seeking to convey here? Some read an ambiguous meaning into 16:7, that part of the scene where the women go to the tomb and find it empty. Does the angel's message to the disciples, "He will go on before you into Galilee and you will see him there, as he told you," imply later physical appearances to them? Or might it simply refer to the Parousia, when Jesus will arrive as the Son of Man? Was it only the later evangelists who came up with the idea of a bodily resurrection and an appearance to his followers "in the flesh"? The tale of the Suffering and Vindication of the Innocent Righteous One had no such feature. If Mark had this innovative idea in mind, why did he not include actual post-resurrection appearances in his story?

As with so much else, we will probably never know.

Part Ten

THE SECOND CENTURY

30

The Remaking of Christian History

After the events depicted in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus of Nazareth and the great panoply of characters surrounding him sleep in a silent limbo for many decades. Their resurrection comes only at the beginning of the 2nd century, when Mary and Pontius Pilate steal from the shadows onto the pages of Ignatius of Antioch's letters. That resurrection is rather a whimper than a bang, for it would be many decades more before the Gospel events emerge fully into the light.

Justin Martyr, in the 150s, is the first Christian writer to make identifiable quotations from the Gospels and to declare that he is doing so, although it is possible that he knows only Matthew and Luke. Even at that, he does not refer to them by name, calling the documents he is quoting from "memoirs of the Apostles."¹⁶⁶ Moreover, his quotations for the most part do not agree with our present texts. Some have suggested that Justin was merely quoting from memory, or that he did not trouble to reproduce the exact wording of his sources. Some have postulated that he was working from a "harmony," an artificially created Gospel combining features and passages from more than one, or all four, of the canonical Gospels into a single synthesis. Justin's pupil, Tatian, was later (c170) to compose the most famous harmony of the four Gospels, known as the *Diatessaron*.

A harmony, however, assumes that a number of Gospels are in widespread circulation and use prior to such a synthesis, and this is precisely what is lacking in the evidence prior to Justin. (Nor is there any evidence of a harmony prior to the *Diatessaron*.) It is more likely that Justin is working with two or three Gospels that have only just emerged into wider Christian consciousness, and that they were to undergo further evolution and revision before arriving at the canonical texts we know today. It is also apparent that the names now attached to those "memoirs of the Apostles" had not yet been applied. In Justin's day they were simply anonymous. The first witness to a fourfold Gospel account of the life and death of Jesus, under the names of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, comes only with Irenaeus around 180.¹⁶⁷

In the writings of the Apostolic Fathers prior to Justin Martyr, we have no clear witness to any use of written Gospels. Those who have studied this matter have concluded that the echoes of Gospel material occasionally found in the Fathers are derived from floating oral traditions or perhaps small collections of sayings (such as that possibly used by 2 Clement); these elements would have found their own way into the written Gospels.¹⁶⁸

We will look at the four major Apostolic Fathers represented in surviving writings of the time: Ignatius of Antioch, Clement of Rome, Polycarp of Smyrna, and the writer of the Epistle of Barnabas.

Ignatius of Antioch

Ignatius is unlikely to be familiar with a written Gospel, for he would surely have appealed to one in support of his declaration that Jesus had been born of Mary and crucified by Pilate. He is familiar with a Lukan-style anecdote about a post-resurrection appearance, but this does not seem to have been derived from a Gospel (see chapter 21). Nor does he appeal to the idea of apostolic tradition, never suggesting that his biography about Jesus is knowledge that has been transmitted over the generations through apostolic channels. Nowhere in all of the seven letters scholarship has assigned to him as genuine (known as the "Shorter Recensions"), written either by himself before his martyrdom around the year 107 (or possibly 116) or pseudonymously within a decade or so after his passing, do these letters quote a single teaching of Jesus, a miracle, or any detail of the trial and passion under Pilate which he so ardently defends. The Longer Recensions of these letters, plus others not considered in any degree authentic (including one to the Virgin Mary, to which she kindly replied), are, by contrast, mostly full of interpolated Gospel references. All this would suggest that the biography Ignatius puts forward is of recent vintage, and that few if any other details of Jesus' human life were known to him. He is the earliest Christian witness outside the Gospels to any knowledge of the Gospel story.

Clement of Rome

A decade or so before Ignatius, the epistle known as 1 Clement was sent to the Christian community in Corinth from the Christian community in Rome. Tradition later identified the writer with Clement, bishop of Rome toward the end of the 1st century. Most scholars today doubt that he was the actual writer, though the letter may have been dispatched during his tenure (if we can rely on Eusebius' bishops lists to know that Clement actually existed). It is usually dated around 96 CE.¹⁶⁹ In chapter 13, 'Clement' says:

Let us remember especially the words of the Lord Jesus, which he spoke in teaching kindness and forbearance. For he said this: "Be merciful, that you may obtain mercy. Forgive, that you may be forgiven. As you do, so shall it be done to you. As you give, so shall it be given to you. As you judge, so shall you be judged. As you are kind, so shall kindness be shown to you. Whatever measure you mete out, so it shall be measured to you."

Though many of these sentiments are to be found in the Synoptics, they nowhere appear as a block like this. Is Clement paraphrasing, or perhaps writing from his memory of a written Gospel? If so, his memory is exceedingly selective, for only a few verses later (14:4) he says: "It is written, 'the kind-hearted will inhabit the earth, and the innocent will remain upon it, but the transgressors will be rooted out of it'." This is not a quotation from the Beatitudes, or even from oral tradition; it is Proverbs 2:21-22. The "it is written" refers, as always in this period, to the Jewish scriptures. Clement must be unfamiliar with Jesus' thoughts in the same vein, as presented in Matthew's Sermon on the Mount and Luke's Sermon on the Plain. Clement also shows himself to be unfamiliar with the Gospel teachings of Jesus on many other topics discussed in his letter.

When Clement comes to describe Jesus' sufferings (ch.16) we must assume that he has no Gospel account to paraphrase or quote from memory, for he simply reproduces the Suffering Servant Song of Isaiah 53. His knowledge of Jesus' passion comes from scripture, as does that of so many other writers in the 1st century. Clement's ignorance on other Gospel elements has been noted at earlier points in this book.

What, then, of that "teaching" of chapter 13, to which can be added 46:8:

Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said: "Woe to that man; it would be better if he had never been born, than that he should lead astray one of my chosen ones."

This is a saying similar to one in Matthew and Luke. But since Clement knows so little of oral traditions about Jesus, must these be regarded as referring to an earthly ministry, let alone quotations from a Gospel?

We have seen in the Pauline letters that the heavenly Christ was regarded as giving instructions to prophets through revelation. Clement also shares in the outlook that sees Christ's voice as residing in scripture. In his chapter 22 he declares:

For it is (Christ) himself who summons us through the Holy Spirit, with the words: "Come, children, listen to me, and I will teach you fear of the lord."

This is Christ speaking—and teaching—through a passage from Psalm 34 (11). Clement says that Christ "spoke" when "teaching" in chapter 13, using the same verb (*elalesen*) that he uses in chapter 16, where the Holy Spirit "spoke" the description of the passion in Isaiah 53. Evidently Clement perceives the two sources as being the same.

The "teaching" of chapter 13, and Clement's phrasing of it, is reminiscent of the field of popular maxims. We know that this kind of moral directive belonged among the ethical commonplaces of the day. This particular passage consists of nothing more than expansions on the Golden Rule. Clement of Alexandria, a century later, quotes a virtually identical block of sayings (*Stromata*, Bk. II, ch. 18), which he attributes to the Lord, there referring to God, demonstrating that free-floating maxims traditional in many circles could be variously attributed, with most of them ending up in Jesus' mouth in Christian tradition.

As for the saying in 46:8 (above), it has all the flavor of an admonition thundered out by Christian prophets. In Clement's world, these things have come to be associated with revelations from the spiritual Christ, just as were Paul's "words of the Lord." Koester (*Ancient Christian Gospels*, p. 15) acknowledges that Clement's sources were probably oral, rather than any version of a written Gospel.¹⁷⁰

Clement's thought world is that of Paul, and his language is much the same:

Through him [Jesus Christ] we fix our gaze on the heights of heaven, through him we see the reflection of his [God's] faultless and lofty countenance, through him the eyes of our hearts were opened... [36]

As in Paul, and in Logos philosophy generally, the Son is the spiritual channel to communication with and knowledge of God, and he bears God's image, an image knowable only through the Son. We have noted before the inadvertently perceptive comment of bishop Lightfoot, a British clerical scholar:

To Clement, Jesus is not a dead man whose memory is reverently cherished or whose precepts are carefully observed, but an ever living, ever active Presence, who enters into all the vicissitudes of Clement's being.

In other words, for Clement and his predecessors, Jesus was no historical person but an ever-living spiritual entity who provides a channel to God and the means for salvation. At the same time, Clement shows the same degree of theocentricity characteristic of most pre-Gospel writings, expressing devotion and love largely to God alone.

Polycarp of Smyrna

Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna was a friend of Ignatius, though he outlived the latter by half a century. He was martyred, if modern scholarly deductions are correct, in 155. Polycarp's single surviving epistle seems to be made up of two pieces, one (ch. 13) written before he learned of Ignatius' fate in the arena, the other (ch. 1-12) some time later, perhaps as much as a quarter of a century.¹⁷¹

Even at that later time Polycarp seems unfamiliar with a written Gospel. In 2:3a he speaks of "the Lord in his teaching" and proceeds to quote part of the block of maxims found in 1 Clement 13. That quote, along with the lead-in words, is acknowledged to be a borrowing from Clement's letter and not from a Gospel. Koester (*op.cit.*, p.20) claims that Polycarp "corrected" the text of 1 Clement to coincide with the wording in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, but this is not true of at least half the phrases, leading one to suspect that the other "corrections" may be simple coincidence. (Alternatively, the present versions in Matthew and Luke may proceed from the wording familiar to Polycarp; or later copyists of Polycarp may have, consciously or unconsciously, altered some of the phrasing to match familiarity with the Gospel versions—a not uncommon occurrence.)

In two other places (2:3b, 7:2) Polycarp uses further sayings found in the Gospels, but the former is not an exact match. Never does Polycarp ever refer

explicitly to written documents. Koester admits (*op.cit.*, p.20): "It is remarkable that Polycarp never uses the term 'gospel' for these documents, and that the words of Jesus are still quoted as if they were sayings drawn from oral tradition."

Unlike Clement, Polycarp makes it clear (7:1) that he believes Jesus came to earth in the flesh. But like Clement, he has no account or traditions to draw from in regard to Jesus' passion. In referring to those 'events' (8:1) he, too, can only quote verses from Isaiah 53.

The Epistle of Barnabas

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The Epistle of Barnabas has been dated anywhere between 90 and 125. Like Polycarp and Clement, 'Barnabas' has no documents or traditions to draw upon when he wishes to describe Jesus' passion (5:2, 5:12, 13). He, too, has recourse to Isaiah (50 and 53) and the Psalms (22 and 119). While Barnabas has a greater sense than any of the other early Fathers that Jesus had been on earth (5:8-11), he has little of substance to say about that incarnation. He speaks of Jesus as teaching the people of Israel, his miracles and wonders, but he fails to itemize any of those teachings or miracles. The latter were expected of the Messiah, so the writer may simply be assuming that such things had happened.

In 5:9 he says that Christ had chosen apostles, but he describes those apostles unlike any portrayal found in the Gospels, calling them "sinners of the worst kind." He bases this on a saying whose source he does not identify: "He came not to call saints but sinners," demonstrating yet again that biographical elements relating to Christian beginnings have been drawn—or deduced—from writings regarded as prophetic. This saying appears in Jesus' mouth in Mark 2:17, but there it applies to Jesus' general audience, not to his apostles. Barnabas quotes other things whose sources are unknown, and it is possible that this saying too is from a writing now lost, or is a unit of oral tradition that has come to be applied to Jesus. Barnabas is not likely to have known Mark and yet misapply this saying so badly, or to so misrepresent the character of the apostles in that Gospel.

His only other quotation of a saying found in the Gospels (Mt. 22:14) is 4:14: "It is written that many are called but few are chosen." The "it is written" tells us that Barnabas looks upon the source as a sacred writing. In his time, this could not have included the Gospel of Matthew—although it may have been recently written by then.

Barnabas is also ignorant of any teachings of Jesus concerning dietary laws, or on what will happen at the End-time, or on "hearing the word of God"—all of which are topics he addresses in his letter. Like the *Didache*, this epistle contains a Two Ways section of moral teaching (ch. 18-21) but none of it is attributed to Jesus. In fact, these directives are referred to as "the precepts of the Lord, as they are set forth in scripture" (21:1). Thus Barnabas' concept of Jesus as a teacher would seem to be a theoretical one, not grounded in actual historical memory or a record of sayings. He goes so far as to say that scripture is the means by which God has made the past known (5:3, compare 1:7)—including, we are to assume, Jesus' own experiences. He even suggests (5:12) that we know the Jews were

responsible for Jesus' death because scripture says so! Amazingly, it is God, not historical memory, which has identified the Jews as those who killed his Son.¹⁷³

Thus, we are confronted with a situation in which four different Christian writers over a period of some 40 years, ranging from Alexandria to Antioch to Asia Minor to Rome, show no knowledge of written Gospels—and this up to a period of some 60 years after the standard dating of Mark. Even the little homily known as 2 Clement, erroneously attributed to Clement of Rome and usually dated a little before the writings of Justin, quotes only sayings allegedly spoken by Jesus; it draws on no narrative events such as might be found in a written Gospel.¹⁷⁴ If Jesus had lived and undergone the experiences portrayed in the Gospels, and if those Gospels had been set down beginning as early as 70 CE, it is difficult to understand how the situation revealed by the Apostolic Fathers could have existed. Though the Fathers are beginning to draw on sayings and maxims which they attribute to Jesus, their abysmal ignorance of the basic content of the Gospels, especially in regard to the passion, would indicate that such documents and their dissemination are a late phenomenon.

Papias

In his *History of the Church* (Bk. III, ch. 39) Eusebius quotes and discusses certain fragments of Papias, who was bishop of the city of Hierapolis in Asia Minor during the early 2nd century. These and other fragments preserved by ancient commentators have been taken from Papias' most famous (and perhaps only) work, called *The Sayings of the Lord Interpreted*. This lost document has been dated between 110 and 140, with majority opinion lying somewhere in the middle of that span.

Modern catalogues of the various fragments of or about Papias usually list as No. 1 a quotation from Irenaeus in the late 2nd century (*Against Heresies*, Bk. V, 33.3-4). This fragment closely parallels a passage (29:4-8) in 2 Baruch, a Jewish apocalyptic work written around the end of the 1st century CE. The passage is about the fertility of vineyards during the anticipated reign of the Messiah. (Both the Messiah and his reign lay, according to the Jewish perspective, in the future.) Papias, according to Irenaeus, has attributed it to Jesus, as a forecast of his own thousand-year reign when he returns from heaven.

This attribution to Jesus of a passage taken from a Jewish writing illustrates not only the unreliability of Papias' own judgment or the traditions he is using about what Jesus had said, it is a good example of the widespread phenomenon of attaching current wisdom, ethical and prophetic material—even that contained in non-Christian sources—to the figure of Jesus, as the latter progressed from myth to history. It casts doubt on everything Papias says, or is reported to have said. Alternatively, if Irenaeus is mistaken, it casts doubt on all the later traditions about Papias and his writings, including in Eusebius.

To this observation one must add the bizarre nature of some of the preserved fragments. No. 18, from Apollinaris, contains a fanciful and gruesome account of the death of Judas. No. 5, from Philip of Side, a 5th century Christian

'storian, has Papias relating how Barsabas, a candidate along with Matthias to replace Judas (see Acts 1:23-6), was forced to drink snake poison and yet survived unharmed. The same fragment records that, according to Papias, the dead raised by Christ survived until the reign of Hadrian (117-138 CE). Clearly, Papias as a witness to anything is highly suspect.

We must therefore take Eusebius' report on Papias with several grains of salt. It starts with a quote from Papias' "Prologue" which includes a confusing reference to a chain of apostolic tradition going back to the earliest apostles, through which Papias claims to have received some information about Jesus.

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Nothing secure can be derived from this passage. Eusebius also includes some fantastic miracle traditions and most important, a reference to documents Papias says he had heard about which were attributed to "Mark" and "Matthew."

Here is that reference as quoted, in two parts, by Eusebius:

This, too, the presbyter [or elder] used to say. "Mark, who had been Peter's interpreter, wrote down carefully, but not in order, all that he remembered of the Lord's sayings and doings. For he had not heard the Lord or been one of his followers, but later, as I said, one of Peter's. Peter used to adapt his teaching to the occasion, without making a systematic arrangement of the Lord's sayings, so that Mark was quite justified in writing down some things just as he remembered them. For he had one purpose only - to leave out nothing that he had heard, and to make no misstatement about it."

Eusebius goes on:

Such is Papias' account of Mark. Of Matthew he has this to say: "Matthew compiled the Sayings in the Aramaic language, and everyone translated them as well as he could." [*History of the Church*, III, 39]

A number of fairly secure conclusions can be drawn from these quotations.

(1) Papias himself had not seen these documents, let alone possessed copies of them. In regard to "Mark" this is information he has received from "the presbyter." Although Papias is not specific when he gets to "Matthew" it is likely that the same situation applies there as well. Besides, if he possessed documents containing sayings and deeds of Jesus as recorded by Jesus' very followers, he would not likely have disparaged written documents in principle in favor of oral tradition, as he does at the end of Eusebius' quote from his Prologue: "For I assumed that what is derived from books does not profit me as much as what is derived from a living and abiding voice." Thus, it would seem that all of this information comes to Papias second-hand and is recounted from memory. He can witness to nothing other than that certain collections of material were circulating sometime in the early 2nd century, which some people were now assigning to an historical Jesus, as recorded by legendary apostolic figures who had come to be regarded as his followers.

(2) Those collections may or may not have circulated under the names of "Mark" and "Matthew." Papias does not specify that this is what they were called, but simply who the reputed compilers were.

(3) It is highly unlikely that these two documents are to be equated with the canonical Gospels now known as Mark and Matthew. In the latter case, Papias states clearly that it was a compilation of sayings. This rules out a narrative work. If it was in Aramaic, it could not be the Gospel of Matthew, since that was a work composed originally in Greek based on the Greek Gospel of Mark. Scholarship has largely abandoned older suggestions that Matthew or any other Gospel existed at an earlier stage in Aramaic. Not even Q, the document used by Matthew and Luke, can be demonstrated to have been written at any stratum in anything other than Greek.

As for Papias' "Mark," this is referred to as a record of Peter's recollections of "the Lord's sayings and doings," but not "in order" nor with the purpose of "constructing an ordered arrangement of the Lord's sayings." While the "doings" suggest anecdotes about deeds of Jesus—probably miracles—the reference to lack of "order" and "arrangement" rules out the narrative Gospel of Mark. Rather, what is suggested is a loose compilation of sayings and anecdotes, probably something along the lines of the Q document which contained sayings and a few miracle and controversy stories reflective of the community's activities.

We might further note that Papias' lost work is focused on collected sayings of the Lord, which could imply that the documents he mentions conformed to that genre. That these were haphazard, unorganized collections is further suggested by all the apology about them which Papias expresses. This in turn suggests that such collections may have had nothing to do with a Jesus figure originally, and only seemed "unordered" as a picture of his ministry when they were assigned to such a figure.

In view of all this, it is surprising how many New Testament scholars have insisted on regarding these remarks as referring to the canonical Gospels of Mark and Matthew, and how they attempt to rationalize those remarks in order to do so.¹⁷⁶

(4) Some scholars assume that Papias possessed copies of these documents, even that he discussed the Gospel sayings of Jesus in his work. This is patently impossible. Not only does Papias' language, as quoted by Eusebius, rule this out, not a single one of the fragments (over a dozen) preserved from his *Sayings of the Lord Interpreted* includes any saying from the canonical Gospels. If Papias had actually discussed *anything* from the Gospels we know, there can be no doubt that Eusebius, having Papias' work in front of him, would have thrown a spotlight on it. If sayings and deeds of Jesus as found in Mark and Matthew had been a feature of Papias' work, later commentators like Philip of Side would hardly have limited themselves to the often ridiculous and repugnant things Papias did have to say.

(5) Whatever Papias' second-hand description referred to, it is possible that traditions like these were drawn on later when it came time, probably a little after Justin, for the Church to decide who might have written the Gospel accounts of Jesus of Nazareth.¹⁷⁷

Marcion and the Gnostic Appropriation of Paul

As outlined in the survey of Gnosticism in chapter 20, a fundamental idea in many gnostic systems was that the true, highest God stood over and above the traditional God of the Jews, with the latter regarded as an evil sub-deity. The most prominent advocate of this idea was Marcion.¹⁷⁸

Marcion came to Rome around 138 CE from Sinope on the Black Sea and joined the Christian Church of Rome. Before long, however, he had adopted the gnostic ideas of Cerdo, who hailed from Syria, that the evil creator-god was Yahweh and that Jesus Christ had come to reveal the true Father, the good God who was higher than the God of the Old Testament. Marcion's Christ was docetic, he remained a true spirit even on earth, but through his death he had broken the power of the evil Yahweh and freed mankind from the Jewish Law. As for Paul, he was the only apostle who had discerned the truth about Jesus' message, unlike Jesus' own followers who had failed to understand his preaching. For these beliefs Marcion was expelled from the Church, traditionally in 144. Within ten years he had established his own Church to rival the Roman one, and soon the Marcionites had spread over much of the empire.

Marcion rejected Judaism and its scriptures as the product and embodiment of the evil creator. This rejection probably accelerated the Roman Church's own movement in the opposite direction: to adopt the Jewish scriptures and claim them as Christianity's own heritage. Marcion formed his own set of authoritative writings embodying the truth—the earliest "canon"—made up of a shorter version of the Gospel of Luke (probably a pre-canonical Ur-Luke) and ten letters of Paul (all but the Pastorals). In Paul, Marcion saw many 'gnostic' ideas which he claimed supported his own doctrines. This appropriation of Paul and the formation of the first recorded Pauline corpus also spurred the Roman Church to move toward establishing its own canon of officially approved documents, which would include four Gospels and a Pauline corpus of 13 letters.¹⁷⁹

Those four Gospels were no doubt subjected to some reworking in the period from Justin to Irenaeus (150-175). Not only does the longer, canonical version of Luke not show up until this time, it would seem that the final, ecclesiastical redaction of the Gospel of John, reworked to soften its dangerously 'gnostic' elements—and possibly to add the Logos hymn in a new Prologue—comes from this period. John Knox has suggested (*Marcion and the New Testament.*, p. 140) that the choice of the four canonicals out of a burgeoning field of available Gospels was not simply a chance affair. It was not so much that these four were chosen *because* they were regarded as more authentic, but that they made the best available candidates for creating a canon; they could be beaten into shape to support the beliefs then current in orthodox circles and to counter Marcionism.

That counter became an ambitious, multi-pronged attack, spread over the third quarter of the 2nd century. Not only would Paul be rehabilitated and rescued from the Gnostics, but a wider apostolic base of authority would be established. The Church proceeded to collect documents from Christian communities all across the empire and turned them into epistles written by the actual followers of

Jesus: Peter, John, James, Jude. These gave authority to the legendary Twelve and fitted Paul and the Church into a broad apostolic stream which would wash away the claims of Marcion and Gnosticism generally.

But the greatest weapon in the war against the Marcionite heretics literally created early Christian history.

The Acts of the Apostles

One of the reactions to Marcion and his appropriation of Paul seems to have been the composition of the Acts of the Apostles, sometime around the middle of the 2nd century. By attaching Paul securely to the Jerusalem apostles, by giving him speeches which held not a trace of heresy—they are identical in tone and content to those put in Peter's mouth—and by ignoring the very fact that Paul had written letters which the Marcionites were declaring gave support to their own doctrines, the Church of Rome reclaimed Paul for itself.

At the same time, Acts created a unified view of the Christian apostolic movement in its spread across the empire, arising out of "Golden Age" events in Judea. Such a picture clearly linked the idealized beginnings of the movement with the Roman Church and not the Marcionites. The construction of Acts was carried out in conjunction with the expansion of the Gospel of Luke over the earlier version used by Marcion, and the two documents were linked under one alleged author (whom I will refer to as "Luke"), Paul's own companion. It was no doubt at this time that the Prologue to Luke's Gospel was added.

A detailed study of Acts is beyond the scope of this book, but we can survey some essential features which support the above scenario.

In pondering the date of Acts, scholars must face the fact that no evidence of it surfaces before 175, in Irenaeus (*Against Heresies*, Bk. III, ch.12:1-15). Justin, in his *Apology* and *Dialogue with the Jew Trypho*, never once cites it (though there may be an allusion to it in Trypho 50), nor does anyone before him. (See the extensive discussion of the witness to Acts in Ernst Haenchen's *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, p.3f.) Several scholars lean toward a date well into the 2nd century. A ground-breaker, John Knox's mid-2nd century date (*Marcion and the New Testament*, p. 124) is seconded by J. T. Townsend ("The Date of Luke-Acts," in *Perspectives on Luke-Acts*, p.47f). Others place it a little before Marcion: J. C. O'Neill at 115-130 (*The Theology of Acts*, p.21), Burton Mack around 120 (*Who Wrote the New Testament?* p. 167). Most recently, Joseph B. Tyson (*Marcion and Luke-Acts: A Defining Struggle*) and Richard Pervo (*Dating Acts*) have joined the growing scholarly migration into the 2nd century.

It is almost a commonplace for conservative scholars and apologists to suggest that Acts was written around 62 CE, after Paul had arrived in Rome but before his martyrdom two years later (according to Church legend), since Acts does not relate the death of Paul. The work ends:

He stayed there two full years at his own expense, with a welcome for all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching the facts about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and without hindrance.

But there is a feasible reason why the author would choose to end his tale at this point. Acts' plot progression is symbolic of the faith's early expansion from Jerusalem to Rome, from a Jewish beginning to a gentile culmination, so the author may have wanted to avoid having the story end on a negative note by recounting Paul's execution.

Robert Price (*The Pre-Nicene New Testament*, p.842) points out that the definite reference to "two years" shows that the author 'knows' how long Paul stayed in Rome before fate overtook him. He calls attention to 20:25 in Paul's farewell address to the elders in Ephesus, saying that "none of you will see my face again." Price deduces that the author knew full well what had happened to Paul. "Luke could not have recorded such a prediction without having known the outcome." Price also reminds us that one of the purposes of Acts is to bring Paul and Peter together in a homogenized apostolic movement; not only does Paul immediately imbed himself in the Jerusalem party, Acts renders them a set of Siamese twins, preaching the same doctrines (almost with the same phrases), performing equal-time miracles and undergoing the same experiences (each escapes from a prison, for example). Each leans toward the other: Peter becomes an apostle to the gentiles, while Paul is portrayed as an observant Pharisee.

The present writer has pointed out in *Challenging the Verdict* (p. 18-19) that, whoever was the author, he could hardly in the years 62 and 63 have gained all the information he records about Paul from tradition, since such traditions would be unlikely to have been circulating that early; he would have been forced to go to Paul himself for much of it. In that case, and especially if he was a companion, it is hard to understand how information from the horse's mouth would end up failing to square with so much of what Paul says in his own letters. Moreover, if Acts was written so early, how is it that no Christian writer, no Father of the Church, shows any knowledge of such a document, *or its content*, for at least a century?

The 2nd century is also the time when expectation of the imminent Parousia of Christ (now a "return" under the influence of the Gospels) was slackening, and both Luke and Acts reflect this backing away from the apocalyptic expectancy of Mark and the 1st century epistles. Christians are settling in for the long haul.¹⁸¹

It is argued that, since the author of Acts shows no sign he is familiar with Paul's letters, this must date Acts earlier than the first corpus of Pauline epistles. But whether a corpus had been formed or not, if the author knew anything of Paul (and how could he not, if he undertook to write a 'biography' of him?) he had to know that Paul was famed as a letter writer. Thus, no matter when Acts was written, its silence on the letters of Paul must be deliberate.

In the scenario of a mid-2nd century composition of Acts, the reason for the silence would have been the fact that those epistles had been appropriated by Marcion. Perhaps the Church's own corpus, through which Paul would undergo rehabilitation, had not yet been completed. Thus Acts' silence on the Pauline letters cannot be used to date the document. In addition, since evidence for the longer, canonical Luke cannot be found before Justin, and the two documents,

Luke and Acts, surface only later in a close twinning which contains evidence that they were written/revised by the same author, it seems justified to date both canonical Luke and Acts post-Marcion.

Many features of Acts have been identified as pointing to 2nd century issues—apostolic tradition and the importance of the apostles as guarantors of the faith, the attitude toward the Jews, a christology resembling that of certain apologists, features resembling those of popular Hellenistic novels of the 2nd century, all serve to place the document well beyond the reach of the apostolic period.

Yet scholars have long noted that Acts contains a markedly primitive view of Christian theology. Like the Gospel of Luke, it has no explicitly redemptive interpretation of the death of Jesus. In Luke, only if one appeals to the longer version of Jesus' eucharistic words found in some manuscripts—probably later accretions under the influence of other Gospels—is anything to be found on the subject of soteriology.^{1M} Paradoxically, this 'primitive' quality in both Acts and the standard Luke fits not the mid or late 1st century when the Pauline type of cultic Christ was still the predominant expression of Christianity. Rather, it fits the mid-2nd century, when the new Gospel picture of Mark's virtually human Jesus had eclipsed the Pauline cosmic Son of God and redemptive Christ. Rather than the Christ of Luke-Acts being "pre-Pauline," as sometimes styled, it is *post*-Pauline, when the Q-like Jesus of the Synoptics had supplanted the spiritual Christ of the cultic movement. Paul would re-enter the fold only subsequently.

Even the Marcionites had little appreciation for the cosmic Son Paul had really preached. They focused instead on using Paul to support their view of the Gospel Jesus as a preacher of the true God over the Jewish creator-god Yahweh. Thus the author of Acts, living at a time when Paul lay under a tainted and obscuring cloud of heretical adoption, probably knew little and understood less of the actual content of Paul's letters, making it easy to simply ignore them. That Paul was not widely known by the Christian world as a whole is something scholars have recently come to realize. Justin has not a word to say about Paul, and only with Irenaeus, once the canon including the Pauline epistles had been put together by the Church of Rome, does he emerge with any force in orthodox circles. This state of affairs during the first hundred years after Paul supports the picture of Christianity as a diverse movement with no central coordination or common tradition.

Contradicting Paul

Luke's disregard of the epistles and ignorance of their content would have been responsible for the other striking feature of Acts: the contradiction in so much of its details with the information contained in Paul's own writings. Acts portrays Paul, upon his conversion, as immediately subordinating himself to the apostles in Jerusalem, but the epistles show him operating quite independently and in occasional conflict with them; he fails even to contact them for three years (Gal. 1:18). Paul in Acts is a faithful observer of the Law, going so far as to circumcise Timothy (16:3). Yet Paul in the epistles maintains that the Law has

run its course and should be suspended (Gal. 3:23-25) and is adamant against any need for the gentiles to be circumcised.

There are major discrepancies between the account in Acts (15:4-29) concerning the so-called Apostolic Council in Jerusalem and Paul's description of these events in Galatians 2. If the regulations stated in Acts' version had truly been agreed upon, Paul's difficulties over circumcision and table fellowship with the gentile would have evaporated. Luke reflects what had been resolved by his own time, and in true sectarian fashion he is anxious to have it grounded and legitimized in a decision by the original apostles. The Paul of Acts is far more accommodating to the continued relevance of the Law than the Paul of the epistles, and more generous toward Luke's gentiles than in his epistolary voice.

Some of the details about Paul in Acts have been judged likely to be fiction: that he was a trained rabbi who studied under Gamaliel (22:3), that he was a Roman citizen—which would make the final quarter of Acts pure invention, since Paul is sent to Rome as a result of his claim of Roman citizenship and the granting of his appeal to Caesar. Even Acts' statement that Paul hailed from Tarsus has been questioned. None of these facts are supplied by Paul, and situations reflected in his letters would belie the first two. As for charismatic activities, Paul provides no support for the idea (20:9-12) that he performed any dramatic miracles, much less raised anyone from the dead.¹⁸² And while we may suppose that he was indeed an agent of persecution for the Jewish authorities in Judea, there is no evidence that their jurisdiction extended as far as Damascus.

Much of the chronology of Acts is incompatible with Paul's movements as constructed from the letters. Acts' repeated portrayal of Paul proceeding first to Jewish synagogues at each center he visits and there preaching his message unsuccessfully, has no support in the epistles, where Paul's failed preaching to the Jews seems to lie entirely in his past. In Acts, Luke is anxious to portray the Jews as constantly rejecting the word of God, in order to reinforce his picture of the gentiles inheriting the promises of "eternal life" (13:46) which the Jews have forfeited. This was very much the self-image of 2nd century Christianity, by then almost entirely gentile in makeup—at least within centrist circles such as Rome.

Paul gives no support to the incident of his own conversion on the Damascus road; considering that the event was shown earlier to be scriptural midrash, we can assume it was simply Luke's invention. Earlier writers who speak of Paul nowhere refer to the long sea voyage with its dramatic shipwreck. As noted above, some consider that this episode (Acts 27-28) may be entirely fictional, emulating a popular element in contemporary Hellenistic romances.¹⁸³

The great disruptive debates in which Paul was engaged in his letters are nowhere in sight in Acts. Though Luke may have possessed pieces of tradition concerning early apostolic activity by Paul—whether accurate, legendary, or tendentious is impossible to say—there can be little doubt that in constructing his account of the beginnings of the Christian faith movement, his sole purpose was to create a picture which would serve the needs of his own time and his own situation. That purpose had nothing to do with faithfully reproducing history.¹⁸⁴

Opening a New Window in Acts

The picture in Acts is generally taken as a window onto the early Jerusalem community and its beliefs, but few details of that picture enjoy any corroboration in the early record. There is a tendency among scholars to suggest that the 'primitive' view of Jesus in Acts—he is not overtly described as divine, nor even as a 'savior'—indicates that this early group of apostles around Peter and James did not hold Jesus to be an actual divinity. But it has been noted before that such a claim is unsupported by Paul, who in his letters clearly links the Jerusalem apostles with his own cultic view of Christ's death and resurrection. He provides no indication that the former's attitude toward Jesus differed so markedly from his own.

Neither Paul nor any other epistle writer mentions the great collective visitation of the Holy Spirit to the apostles at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). Rather, Paul's view of the Spirit, as witnessed in passages like 2 Corinthians 11:4, is a matter of personal revelation to individuals. Luke has focused that widespread phenomenon of the early prophetic movement onto a single, representative dramatic event. It has been suggested that the tradition of the Pentecost event could have evolved out of the 'seeing' of Jesus by 500 brethren as mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:6. Possibly, although this would require the tradition to have been transformed from an experiencing of Jesus to an experiencing of the Holy Spirit; an evolution in the other direction would seem more natural.

The great martyrdom of Stephen with its picture of the "Hellenist" community in Jerusalem (6:1-7:60) sounds not an echo in the early evidence. Some now regard Stephen as a fictional character. Luke, again in sectarian fashion, is representing the largely gentile nature of the faith in his own time as having had an archetypal existence in a group in Jerusalem during the earliest days of the movement. There are suspicious parallels between Luke's account of Stephen's death and descriptions of James the Just's murder in the year 62, as described by Hegesippus, recorded in Eusebius (*History of the Church*, II, 23).

Scholars admit that no sources can be identified for Acts. We know of no documents Luke might have used for his information, nor is there any sign from distinctive features of style or form that he is incorporating sources unknown to us. The speeches are clearly constructed by the author.¹⁸⁵ Virtually all of them have the same tone and content. All indications are that Luke (i.e., the original Luke's later church editor), in writing Acts, is composing and not compiling.

Thus, the Acts of the Apostles opens a window, not onto earliest Christianity, but onto the Christian ecclesiastical movement centered in Rome during the mid-2nd century, one which was seeking to establish a new orthodoxy based on the historical Jesus recently generated by the Gospels. But there was something else on the scene as well, something notably different from either the Roman Church or its Gnostic rivals, and indeed, something different from the cultic Christ of Paul: the expression of 'Christianity' embodied in most of the 2nd century apologists. To that, we now turn.

Jesus in the Christian Apologists

The 2nd century was the period of formative growth for Christianity as we know it. Gospels which had their roots in the very late 1st century were spreading throughout the Christian world, and by the time of Justin were coming to be accepted in many circles as historical accounts. The Acts of the Apostles was written around the middle of the century to provide a unified picture of Christian beginnings and the apostolic movement, one to fit the new scenario created by the Gospels. Acts joined Paul to the Jerusalem apostles in a way which took away his independence and undercut Marcion's claim that Paul had held doctrines compatible with his own. Diverse pieces of writing were collected from communities all over the Christian world, most of them in the form of epistles, though a couple may have been recast to fit that form. It is possible that some had their names ascribed to them only at that time, names of legendary apostles of the Christ now regarded, thanks to Mark, as having been disciples of the Gospel Jesus. As for Paul himself, a corpus of his genuine letters, along with others written in his name, was put together, in imitation of an earlier, more limited collection by Marcion. These diverse writings by early cultic Christians were now assumed to have been speaking of the Jesus of the Gospels.

Much of this work of collection and rehabilitation was performed by the Church of Rome, and there is no doubt that this undertaking, with its focus on the new historical Jesus and its summoning of both Peter and Paul to the city for preaching and martyrdom (Peter even to be its first bishop), was a major factor in that Church's eventual ascendancy to a position of power over the previously fragmented Christian world. The recognition of such a political advantage was no doubt a key factor in the enthusiasm with which the idea of an historical Jesus was embraced and promoted. The next two centuries were to see the Roman bishopric assert its hegemony over all strands of the Christian movement, both "orthodox" and "heretical." Once it gained real political power, anything falling into the latter category was gradually and systematically exterminated.

But the 2nd century scene, for much of its course, was anything but united in the new views of Jesus and Christian history. This is nowhere so evident as in the Christian apologists of the period 130-180, men like Justin Martyr, Tatian, Theophilus of Antioch, Athenagoras of Athens. Once again, as in the 1st century, we encounter diversity, a lack of common doctrine, no centralized authority and a weak concept of apostolic tradition. We also encounter a telling range of silence on the reputed founder of the movement.

The Apologists as Platonic Philosophers

Those who study the apologists have made some surprising observations. They note how little continuity these writers show with earlier traditions. Their ideas often have nothing in common with those of the epistles and even the Gospels. There is no dependence on Paul. Moreover, such writers seem not to move in ecclesiastical circles. Even Justin, though he worked in Rome, has nothing to say about bishops and church organizations. And almost all of them before the year 180 (Justin being the major exception) are silent on the Gospels and the figure of Jesus contained in them. In fact, one could say that they pointedly ignore, and even deny, any historical figure at all.

Scholars specializing in the 2nd century have characterized the Christianity of the apologists as essentially a philosophical movement. Whereas the premier expression of Christian development in the 1st century, the one belonging to Paul and the Jerusalem group, was chiefly a Jewish messianic and apocalyptic salvation cult with a dying and rising god, that of the apologists, all located in cosmopolitan centers of the empire, was a religion of Platonic philosophy and Hellenistic Judaism.

Justin, the apologist about whom we know the most, came to Christianity after having investigated all the other popular philosophies of his day: the Stoics, Peripatetics (derived from Aristotle), the Pythagoreans. Finally, he was schooled in Middle Platonism, the predominant philosophical outlook which colored most everything else in this era, especially in its strongly religious concerns about the nature of the Deity and its relationship to humanity. When Justin encountered Christianity, he judged it to be the best version of contemporary philosophy. In Rome, he seems to have had no connection with any church body, but set up his own school, teaching Christian philosophy in the manner of pagan philosophers.

What was this 'Christian philosophy' as presented by the apologists? There is no question that it had roots in Judaism. It preached the monotheistic worship of the Jewish God, a God presented as much superior to those of the pagans. For information about this God it looked to the Hebrew scriptures. It placed great value on a mode of life founded on Jewish ethics—again, something presented as superior to the ethical philosophy of the pagans. At the same time, it derived from Platonism the concept of a Son of God, a 'second God' or Logos (Word), a divine force active in the world and serving as an intermediary between God and humanity. In the 2nd century even more so than in the first, this idea of the Logos was floating in the air of most Greek philosophies as well as Hellenistic Judaism. For the apologists, this Logos was the emanation of the Jewish God, his "Son."

Thus the religion of the apologists has been styled "Platonic-biblical" or "religious Platonism with a Judaistic cast," although it was in the process of wresting away from those Jews the ancient promises of their God and even their own scriptures. It would seem to have grown out of mixed pagan and Jewish Diaspora circles which had immersed themselves in Greek philosophy. (Justin and others, including the Gnostic movement, provide evidence of heretical Jewish sects, with many gentiles attached, which had evolved a great distance

from traditional Jewish loyalty and thinking.) There is little to suggest that the religion of the 2nd century apologists proceeded out of the 1st century branch of Christian development surrounding Paul. Nor is there any of the Gospels' focus on the Messiah or the end of the world. The apologists' views of salvation are rooted in Greek mysticism, not Jewish martyrology for sin. Instead, the two expressions seem like separate branches of a very broad tree.¹⁸⁶

Another aspect is the fact that in almost all the apologists we find a total lack of a sense of history. They do not talk of their religion as an ongoing movement with a specific century of development behind it, through a beginning in time, place and circumstances, and a spread in similar specifics. Some of them pronounce it to be very "old" and they look back to roots in the Jewish prophets rather than to the life of a recent historical Jesus. In this, of course, they are much like the 1st century epistle writers.

Justin, and whoever recast the Gospel of John to include the Prologue with its hymn equating the Logos with Jesus, came to believe that the intermediary Word, the spiritual Son of God, had been incarnated in a human figure as recounted in the Gospels. But is this true of the apologists as a whole? For the astonishing fact is that of the half dozen major apologists up to the year 180—after that, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria and Origen are all firmly anchored in Gospel tradition—none, with the exception of Justin, introduces an historical Jesus into their defenses of Christianity to the pagan.

Theophilus of Antioch

We can start with Theophilus of Antioch. According to Eusebius, he became bishop in that city in 168, but one has to wonder. In his treatise *To Autolycus*, apparently written in the year 180, he tells us that he was born a pagan and became a Christian after reading the Jewish scriptures, a situation common to virtually all the apologists.

But what, for Theophilus, is the meaning of the name "Christian"? The Autolycus of the title has asked him this question. He answers (I, 12): "Because we are anointed with the oil of God." Though the name "Christ" itself means Anointed One, from the anointed kings of Israel, no reference is made to Christ himself in regard to the meaning of "Christian." In fact, Theophilus never mentions Christ, or Jesus, at all. He makes no reference to a founder-teacher; instead, Christians have their doctrines and knowledge of God through the Holy Spirit. Along with the pronouncements of the Old Testament prophets, he includes "the gospels" (III, 12), but these too are said to be the inspired word of God, not a record of Jesus' words and deeds. When he quotes ethical maxims corresponding to Jesus' Gospel teachings, he presents them (III, 14) as the teaching of "gospels," not of Jesus himself. He can attribute a saying from Proverbs as the voice of Solomon, and a line of Genesis as the voice of Moses, but the voice of Jesus is never acknowledged. Furthermore, nothing from those "gospels" constitutes *narrative*; there are no events of Jesus' life mentioned. For all one can tell, they may have been collections of sayings only.

And what is Theophilus' Son of God? He is the Word through whom God created the world, who was begat by him along with Wisdom (II, 10). He is the governing principle and Lord of all creation, inspiring the prophets and the world in general to a knowledge of God. Yet Theophilus has not a thing to say about this Word's incarnation into flesh, or any deed performed by him on earth. In fact, he hastens to say (II, 22) that this is not a Son in the sense of begetting, but as innate in the heart of God.¹⁸⁷ He says that in order to bring about "all that he determined on," God begot the Word; but this "all" does not seem to have encompassed the bringing about of salvation, redemption from the Fall and an atoning sacrifice for sin, for no earthly begetting of the Son is mentioned in regard to such determinations.

Here he seems to quote part of the opening lines of the Gospel of John—the Word as God and with God from the beginning, instrumental in creation—but nothing else. We cannot tell if this is from the full-blown Gospel, or only from an existing Logos hymn John may have drawn upon. (The name "John," the only evangelist mentioned, could be a later marginal gloss inserted into the text; but see below.) The writers of the "gospels," Theophilus says, are "spirit-bearing [inspired] men," not witnesses to an historical Jesus, thus stating that the source of their information is through revelation, not the words and deeds of Jesus.

This quote from "John" is contained within a very telling passage. Through that quote he has identified the Son, the Word, with God. "The Word was God." First, we may observe that if this "Word" was in Theophilus' mind equated with the man Jesus of Nazareth, he would then be implying (rather than stating, as he does not) to the pagan Autolycus that the man Jesus of Nazareth was God. That would be quite an additional dimension beyond simply saying, which is the only thing he does, that God emanated a divine entity from himself known as the Word. Could Theophilus in all honesty have in mind the equating of Jesus of Nazareth with the Word and not even hint at it? Autolycus would hardly be left to himself to make that equation. Either he knew it already, in which case there would be no reason for Theophilus to conceal it, or he did not and he was being deliberately misled by a woefully inadequate picture.

Be that as it may, Theophilus in this chapter (II, 22) has posed a theoretical question as though coming from a pagan with a philosophical objection:

You will say, then, to me: "You said that God ought not to be contained in a place, and how do you now say that he walked in Paradise [i.e., Eden]?"

In other words, the postulated challenge is that God should not be said to confine himself to a specific place, as for example in Eden. Theophilus counters by agreeing that God cannot be contained in a place, but:

His Word, through whom he made all things, being his power and his wisdom, assuming the person of the Father and Lord of all, went to the garden in the person of God, and conversed with Adam.

In the first passage, the language indicates that this is not an actual objection being quoted, but Theophilus himself presenting a hypothetical question, though

it may be a *type* of question he has encountered. But that same objection would be much more compelling in regard to a different case, for surely the most momentous and immediate example of God 'being in a place on earth' would have been in the matter of the recent human incarnation of Jesus the Word. This would have been an even more philosophically objectionable idea of God being "in a place" than simply having his spirit come to the Garden of Eden and speak to Adam and Eve. Why would Theophilus content himself with the example of sending the Word to Paradise rather than that of sending him to earth as a man?

Another telling passage is found in II, 14. There, Theophilus presents the broad world as likened to a sea, "driven and tempest-tossed by sins." Because of its wickedness and sin, it would long since have been doomed had not God provided islands in this sea, in the form of

- ...assemblies—we mean holy churches—in which survive the doctrines of
- the truth...into these run those who desire to be saved, being lovers of the truth....[And a few sentences later in his analogy:] And as there are other islands, rocky and without water...so there are doctrines of error—I mean heresies—which destroy those who approach them, for they are not guided by the word of truth.

What does Theophilus tell us are the features, the doctrines of truth, of the former islands, the 'holy churches'? While they are not spelled out, he does tell us their nature and their source:

...so also the world, if it had not had the law of God and the prophets flowing and welling up sweetness, and compassion, and righteousness, and the doctrine of the holy commandments of God, would long ere now have come to ruin...

In other words, the saving means for a world beset in a stormy sea is "the law of God and the prophets," and "the holy commandments of God." From these have come the doctrines of truth. Once again, Jesus and his teachings on earth are ignored and excluded; compassion and righteousness are not to be identified with him. Rather, here we have the consistent marks of the apologist writers of the 2nd century: a focus on God and the scriptures as the sources of knowledge and salvation; the Son may be an important part of that knowledge, but he is nowhere presented as an agent of salvation who performed his role as a human being on earth.^{1xs}

Elsewhere in his work, Theophilus tells Autolycus that the Christian doctrine is not recent, that it is "not modern or fabulous but ancient and true" (III, 16), and that "we Christians alone have possessed the truth, inasmuch as we are taught by the Holy Spirit, who spoke in the holy prophets and foretold all things" (I, 33). This type of statement is not merely silent on a recent historical Jesus, it *excludes* him as having had nothing to do with Christians acquiring truth.

As for redemption, everyone will gain eternal life who are obedient to the commandments of God (II, 27). This is salvation by knowledge of God and his laws, which is a hallmark of the apologists' Logos religion. There is no concept

in Theophilus of an atoning sacrificial death of Jesus, a death he never mentions. And when challenged on his doctrine that the dead will be raised—Autolycus has demanded: "Show me even one who has been raised from the dead!"—this Christian has not a word to say about Jesus' own resurrection, let alone Gospel traditions that Jesus had raised others. He even accuses the pagans of worshipping "dead men" (I, 9) and ridicules them for believing that Hercules and Aesclepius were raised from the dead (I, 13). These are the first of many passages we will call attention to in which the apologists condemn features of pagan belief which have close if not exact parallels in supposed Christian belief.

All this, in answer to an Autolycus who has asked: "Show me thy God."

Athenagoras of Athens

Athenagoras of Athens, who worked in Alexandria, wrote around the same time, though one ancient witness, Philip of Side, places him a few decades earlier.¹⁰¹ He was a philosopher who had embraced Christianity, but he too shows no involvement in any church, or interest in rituals and sacraments. In *A Plea for the Christians*, addressed to the emperor, he says this of his new beliefs:

We acknowledge one God...by whom the Universe has been created through his Logos, and set in order and kept in being...for we acknowledge also a Son of God....If it occurs to you to enquire what is meant by the Son, I will state that he is the first product of the Father (who) had the Logos in himself. He came forth to be the idea and energizing power of all material things. [10]

Regrettably, in the course of 37 chapters, Athenagoras neglects to tell the emperor that Christians believe this Logos-Son to have been incarnated in the person of an historical Jesus of Nazareth. He dissects contemporary Platonic and Stoic philosophy, angels and demons, as well as details of various Greek myths, but he offers not a scrap about the life of the Savior. He presents (11) Christian doctrine as things "not from a human source, but uttered and taught by God," and proceeds to quote ethical maxims very close to parts of the Sermon on the Mount: "Love your enemies; bless them that curse you..." Other quotations he labels as coming from scripture, or from "our teaching." Are these perhaps ethical collections that are unattributed to Jesus? Athenagoras never uses the term "gospel." He speaks of "the witness to God and the things of God" and enumerates the prophets and other men, yet he ignores what should have been the greatest witness of them all, Jesus of Nazareth.

Then in chapter 32, he says: "For the Logos again says to us..." and he goes on to present some unknown dictum about the evils of kissing. Not only do all these quotes indicate that he regards such teachings as from a divine source—specifically saying that their source is not human, which would rule out to any non-Christian reader that they were uttered by a man on earth—the Logos quote speaks to a view of this heavenly entity as one that issues commandments. Here, then, the apologist has missed a golden opportunity. He presents such divine teachings with pride, and they might in fact strike the emperor Marcus Aurelius (if he indeed was the one being addressed) as laudable. If Athenagoras thinks

that the Christian ethical code demonstrates moral superiority, why not present it as the product of the human Jesus and raise the founder's stock in pagan eyes? In fact, not a single apologist other than Justin has recourse to such an opportunity.

In one of the most devastating passages in all the apologists, Athenagoras demonstrates that he will have no truck with any divine incarnation in flesh. Chapter 21 is a rant against the anthropomorphic qualities of the Greek gods:

But should it be said that they only had fleshly forms, and possess blood and seed, and the affections of anger and sexual desire, even then we must regard such assertions as nonsensical and ridiculous; for there is neither anger, nor desire and appetite, nor procreative seed, in gods....Let them, then, have fleshly forms, but let them be superior to wrath and anger....Let them have fleshly forms, but let not Aphrodite be wounded by Diomedes in her body....Do they not pour forth impious stuff of this sort in abundance concerning the gods?...Are they not in love? Do they not suffer? Nay, verily, they are gods, and desire cannot touch them! Even though a god assume flesh in pursuance of a divine purpose, he is therefore the slave of desire....He is created, he is perishable, with no trace of a god in him.

This passage rivals those of other apologists we are examining for the open denigration of features of the Greek myths which are supposedly paralleled by those of orthodox Christian faith about the man Jesus. Does Athenagoras know the Gospel of Matthew, yet accept its descriptions of Jesus' righteous anger against all and sundry, from Pharisees to fig trees? Can he embrace the event of Jesus' crucifixion and the bloody wounding of his body? Would he declare to the emperor that when gods assume flesh they are slaves of desire, that they lose all trace of being gods, without arguing for the exception that an incarnated Jesus would surely need to be accorded? If the apologist is trying to demonstrate the follies of gods who take on flesh, should not a natural strategy be to demonstrate by Jesus' example how a divinity incarnated into flesh *should* comport himself? It is not a matter of whether we should allow that Athenagoras could for whatever politic reason have kept silent on Jesus. It is a question of how any Christian believing in the incarnated Jesus on earth could make such statements on his own account with no qualification. And he is far from alone.

Without an incarnation, there is in Athenagoras' presentation of the Christian faith no death and resurrection of Jesus, no sacrifice and Atonement. Eternal life is gained "by this one thing alone: that (we) know God and his Logos" (12). Here is another statement tantamount to the exclusion of any thought of salvation being attained through Jesus' acts of death and resurrection.¹⁹⁰ In fact, the names Jesus and Christ never appear in Athenagoras. Yet he can say (11), "If I go minutely into the particulars of our doctrines, let it not surprise you." One might be forgiven for regarding this as blatant dishonesty.

Athenagoras and his work went virtually unnoticed throughout the early centuries of Christianity (possibly because it never mentioned any Jesus). His apology seems to have been unknown to Tertullian, Eusebius and Jerome. He was quoted only by Methodius (4th century) and Philip of Side (5th century), with

a couple of others quoting Methodius' fragment. Not only does this speak to the unreliability of later traditions, it illustrates the degree of isolation in which some authors or circles could exist and the limitations of the networking across the Christian movement as a whole. This should be kept in mind when examining how circles of one form of faith could exist and flourish within a broad conglomeration of Christianity and its diverse forms of belief.

The Epistle to Diognetus

The anonymous Epistle to Diognetus is often included with the Apostolic Fathers. But it is really an apology, a defense of Christianity addressed probably to an emperor, either Hadrian or Marcus Aurelius. Most scholars lean to an early date (c130). The name Jesus never appears. The Son revealed God, but is not portrayed as a human teacher. It is claimed that in this apologetic work at least, the Son is said to have been sent down to earth, although no time, place, or identity for this supposed incarnation are provided. But a close examination of the text renders even this dubious. In chapter 7, the writer tells us:

...God Himself...has sent from heaven, and placed among men, [Him who is] the truth, and the holy and incomprehensible Word, and has firmly established Him in their hearts....As a king sends his son, who is also a king, so sent He Him; as God He sent Him; as to men He sent Him; as a Savior He sent Him, and as seeking to persuade, not to compel us....

Might this be an incarnation in flesh? Compare Baruch 3:37 which says, "Thereupon Wisdom appeared on earth and lived among men." No scholar views this as an incarnation of Wisdom. The epistles regularly speak of the Son being "sent," but with no recognizable sense of earthly incarnation. Galatians 4:6 has the "spirit" of the Son being sent into people's hearts, very much like the above sentiment that the Word has been sent from Heaven and established in the human heart. The latter statement, in fact, tells us that the 'sending' is a spiritual one. Nor does chapter 9, with its allusion to an atonement doctrine, cast any clearer light on the question:

He Himself took on Him the burden of our iniquities, He gave His own Son as a ransom for us, the holy One for transgressors, the blameless One for the wicked, the righteous One for the unrighteous....

Is this the Gospel crucifixion, a death on Calvary? There is nothing earthly about it. No Gospel details are mentioned, no manner of the Son's death (if that is what it was), no resurrection. In fact, it is derived from Isaiah 53. It could as easily be a mythical concept inspired by scripture, nothing more. Considering that there is no reference anywhere in this epistle to Gospels, to the name Jesus, to an historical time or place, there is little to justify seeing the idea as dependent on any historical tradition whatever. Thus, we have an unusual situation in this particular apologist in that some form of sacrificial notion is put forward, and yet it remains frustratingly without clarity or context. It would seem that this writer and his community have developed an additional idea about the Son and Logos

they worship, an idea they have taken from scriptural passages. As yet, they have developed no details about a life on earth—if indeed they envision such. We can thus glimpse a link to some precedent of cultic Christ belief similar to that of the epistles, a similarity which comes into focus later in chapter 9:

Having therefore convinced us in the former time that our nature was unable to attain to life, and having now revealed the Savior who is able to save even those things which it was [formerly] impossible to save, by both these facts He [God] desired to lead us to trust in His kindness, to esteem Him our Nourisher, Father, Teacher, Counselor, Healer, our Wisdom, Light, Honor, Glory, Power, and Life....

What is it that has happened in the present time? Like the New Testament epistles' consistent mode of expression, it is not the coming of the Son to earth, but once again the *revealing* of him. The "revealed" verb above is *deiknumi*: to show, present, to make known, to announce. This virtually guarantees that the "sending" of the Savior spoken of in chapter 7 is a spiritual one, a *revelation* of the Son. Incarnation, a birth on earth, would simply not be described this way. Then we note that, again like much other early Christian expression, the Son acts in the present, not in the past. Now that he has been revealed, he *is* able to save. Again like the epistles, the focus is on God as the primary agent of salvation. The writer gives him a long list of titles, and all his emotion is directed toward him, as it is throughout the work. No titles, no thanks, no emotion is bestowed on the Son himself, a coldness we find in other apologists' writings about the Logos. Could this writer really have any knowledge of a Jesus of Nazareth who had bled and died for him on a cross outside Jerusalem? As for a resurrection, there is not a word of it throughout the entire document.

All this in response to Diognetus' "close and careful inquiries" about the Christian religion.

The final two chapters of the sole surviving manuscript of the Epistle to Diognetus, which contain a reference to apostles and disciples of the Word, have been identified as originally belonging to a separate document, probably a homily from the mid-2nd century.¹⁹¹ Even here we cannot be sure that this second writer has an historical Jesus in mind. The name itself still fails to appear; all references are to the Son or Word:

I minister the things delivered to me to those that are disciples worthy of the truth. For who that is rightly taught and begotten by the loving Word [*or*, and becoming a friend to the Word], would not seek to learn accurately the things which have been clearly shown by the Word to His disciples, to whom the Word being manifested has revealed them, speaking plainly [to them], not understood indeed by the unbelieving, but conversing with the disciples, who, being esteemed faithful by Him, acquired a knowledge of the mysteries of the Father. For which reason He sent the Word, that He might be manifested to the world; and He, being despised by the people [of the Jews], was, when preached by apostles, believed on by gentiles....

The Word 'being sent' looks like the reference in the earlier part of the text, a spiritual sending. The "disciples" to whom the Word is being manifested—using the common revelation verb *{phaneroo}* of the New Testament epistles—are those who presently subscribe to the writer's faith and philosophy, as the first sentence shows; they are not disciples of a Jesus in the past. The manifesting to the world is another revelation verb: *phaino*, to appear, become visible, to be brought to light. As for the "despised by the people," it is the translator who adds "of the Jews," which may or may not be the intent; if it is, the writer may simply be contrasting the reception of the revealed Word by the gentiles with that of the Jews. The former had proven much more receptive to it, no doubt because of the longstanding Logos tradition in Greek philosophy. This writer, like Athenagoras, envisions the Logos as speaking to the believer.

The writer goes on to describe the revealed Word:

This is He who was from the beginning, who appeared [*phaino*, bring to light] as if new, and was found old, and yet who is ever born afresh in the hearts of the saints.

This is hardly a description of a life on earth. When the Word was revealed in recent times as though a new idea, the claim was that he was in fact old, existing with God from the beginning. He is ever "born" in the hearts of believers, a thought in tune with all that has been said about the Word being revealed and sent. There is no sign of an incarnational birth. It is all a spiritual relationship between heaven and earth, between divine entities and human believers.

Tatian

We turn now to Tatian, a reputed pupil of Justin in Rome. He was converted to Christianity, he says, by reading the Jewish scriptures. At a later stage of his career, after apostatizing to the heretical sect of the Encratites and going off to Syria, Tatian composed his *Diatessaron* (it partially survives today through an Arabic translation). But while still in Rome, some time around 160, he wrote an Address to the Greeks, urging pagan readers to turn to the truth. In this description of Christian truth, Tatian uses neither "Jesus" nor "Christ," nor even the name "Christian." Much space is devoted to outlining the Logos, the creative power of the universe, first-begotten of the Father, through whom the world was made—but none to the incarnation of this Logos. His musings on God and the Logos (ch. 13, 19), rather than being allusions to the Gospel of John as some claim, contradict the Johannine Prologue in some respects and may reflect Logos commonplaces of the time. Resurrection of the dead is not supported by Jesus' own resurrection. Eternal life is gained through knowledge of God (13:1), not by an atoning sacrifice of Jesus.

In the Address we find a few allusions to Gospel sayings, but no attribution to Jesus and no specific reference to written Gospels. Instead, all knowledge comes from God himself. Tatian says he was "God-taught" (29:2). If he knew of any Gospels, he never appeals to them for support. He does, however, make a revealing comment about mythical stories, to be seen in a moment.

By tradition (we find it in Irenaeus and Tertullian), Tatian was a "pupil" of Justin, and Justin's acceptance of the Gospels is on that basis often accorded to Tatian. But our meager knowledge of their relationship does not justify such a conclusion. Irenaeus' remarks (A.H. I, 23) are sparse, and the two probably never met. (Irenaeus visited Rome in 177, long after Tatian had departed.) We have no record of the course of Tatian's tutorship, when exactly it began or finished, how intense it may have been, what degree of influence Justin had on him compared to other inputs, and so on. All we have is a single writing by Tatian, and in it he is silent on Justin as his teacher, mentioning him only twice. In chapter 18, he states that "the most admirable Justin has rightly denounced (the demons) as robbers."¹⁹² The second is even less significant, a remark in chapter 19 about a certain official who "endeavored to inflict on Justin, and indeed on me, the punishment of death." Tatian speaks of his conversion through reading the Jewish scriptures; nowhere does he suggest that Justin had anything to do with it or with teaching him what he believes. The fact that Tatian later composed the *Diatessaron* says nothing about his earlier beliefs, or whether this 'conversion' to the Gospels was due to the delayed influence of Justin.

Finally, around the year 155, the first Latin apologist, Minucius Felix, wrote a dialogue between a Christian and a heathen, entitled *Octavius*. It, too, presents a Christianity without an historical Jesus, and in fact contains a startling rejection of such an origin for the faith. It will be examined in detail presently.

Apologizing for the Apologists

As one can see by this survey, if one leaves aside Justin Martyr there is a silence in the 2nd century apologists on the subject of the historical Jesus which is virtually the equal of that found in the 1st century epistle writers. Commentators on these works, like those studying the earlier epistles, have struggled to come up with explanations.

One is that the apologists were concerned first and foremost with preaching the monotheistic Father, the God of the Jews, while debunking the Greek myths with their all-too-human and morally uninspiring divinities. This is true. But this should not have precluded them from giving space to the most essential feature of their faith; and besides, the apologists have no reluctance about bringing in a Son of God in the form of the Logos. The apologists as a group profess a faith which is nothing so much as a Logos religion. It is in essence Platonism carried to its fullest religious implications and wedded with Jewish theology and ethics. The figure of Jesus of Nazareth as the incarnation of the Logos is a graft, an adoption which was embraced only by Justin and the later Tatian.

The glaring anomaly which must be explained is this: how can an apologist be giving his pagan readers a meaningful picture of the Christian faith when he leaves out the most central of its elements, the figure of Jesus and what he had done for salvation? How was the reader to understand the history and origins of the movement without him? How was the apologist offering a 'defense' of his religion when he is silent on its very core?

Inevitably, commentators have been led to conclude that the omission—indeed, the suppression—of Jesus was deliberate. Pagan philosophers like Galen had challenged Christian thinkers that their faith was based on revelation rather than reasoned philosophical argument. They had ridiculed the idea of a crucified god. The heathen attitude had made it impolitic to speak of Jesus of Nazareth, and so he had to be kept in the closet. However, it needs to be pointed out that this is a conclusion drawn by modern scholars based on certain factors they have perceived in the 2nd century situation. Those factors did exist, but there is no intimation by the apologists themselves that such factors are the reasons why they have remained silent on the historical Jesus.

In fact, too many common sense arguments tell against this explanation. First, a writer like Athenagoras is quite adept at reasoned, sophisticated argument. Why not apply such talents to a justification of the faith's principal tenet? If the world is maligning Jesus, surely the overriding need is to rehabilitate him, not hide him away. Second, this blatant suppression of Jesus, the misrepresentation of everything from the name "Christian" to the source of Christian ethics, amounts to nothing less than a *denial* of Christ. The apologist is constructing a picture that excludes the central elements of the faith, falsifying his presentation, leaving no room for Jesus. He has gone beyond silence by stating "I have said all there is to say." In an age when Christian pride and fortitude required that any penalty be faced—even the ultimate one—rather than renounce the faith, this gutting of Christian doctrine would have smacked of betrayal. It would have horrified believers and quickly discredited the apologists in Christian eyes. Could any of them really have chosen to defend the Name by expunging it?

Moreover, who would they be fooling? Any pagan who knew the first thing about Christianity would presumably have been familiar with the figure of Jesus of Nazareth as the movement's founder. (An elephant in the room is never easy to conceal.) Few of them may have read the Gospels—Celsus is probably an exception—but many of them would at least have heard of the Christian founder. An 'apology' for the faith which left him out would readily be seen for the sham that it was, thus foiling the whole object of the exercise. Besides, Justin, the most prominent of the apologists, felt no qualms about placing Jesus at the center of his exposition. Tatian was someone who cared not a fig for the objections or sensibilities of any pagan. Anyone who felt a fear or reluctance to spell out the faith in all its important elements was not likely to have undertaken to write an apology in the first place, realizing the pitfalls and futility in such an approach. And beyond the year 180 no Christian writer felt any need or pressure to suppress Jesus. (A few decades later, Tertullian, in chapter 4 of his *Ad Nationes*, was urging that the pagan ought to find out who the founder was, so that his sect might be properly understood.)

Another important consideration is that the apologists were arguing for the superiority of Christian ethics and its monotheistic view of God. If Jesus had been the source of these teachings, their stature would have been raised by being presented as the product of a great teacher; while at the same time, the attribution

to Jesus of this estimable body of ethics and theology would have gone a long way toward redeeming him in pagan eyes for whatever Christians might have been claiming about him which met with their disapproval.

On the other hand, it is dubious that general pagan disapproval of Christianity was due to the figure of Jesus or his reputed teachings, or even to claims that he had been resurrected from the dead. Such things had sufficient commonality with the cultic beliefs of pagans themselves (as Celsus admits and attests) that they would hardly have provoked the widespread reaction witnessed to by the apologists and by the government's chronic persecution. Rather it was the calumnies of alleged pernicious activities on the part of Christians, together with their denial of the traditional gods and their refusal to engage in state religious observances, which led to denigration and charges of hatred. We can hardly imagine that the teachings of Christ (or most of them) as laid out in the Gospels would have been regarded by the pagans as abominable, or that his reputed miracles—especially the healings—would not have placed him in a popular vein that included their own healer god Aesclepius. There should have been every reason for apologists to accentuate these things, to bring out the best—not bury them—as promising avenues to convince pagans that Christianity was founded on commendable and attractive elements, with an admirable founder to boot.

The fact that before almost the end of the century no one but Justin has incorporated the human, teaching Jesus into his appeals to the pagan is too bizarre a situation. No, some other explanation for the silence of almost the whole of the apologetic movement must be sought.

Tatian's "Stories"

A clue to the solution of this puzzle lies in Tatian's Address. In chapter 21 he says,

We are not fools, men of Greece, nor are we talking nonsense when we declare that God has been born in the form of man. You who abuse us should compare your ο\Nn stories [*mythous*] with our narratives [*diegemasin*]....

He goes on to describe some of the Greek myths about gods come to earth, undergoing suffering and even death for the benefaction of mankind.

....So take a look at your own records and accept us merely on the grounds that we too tell stories [*mythologountas*]. We are not foolish, but you talk nonsense [*kai hemeis men ouk aphrainomen, phlenapha de ta humetera*].... [Translation by Molly Whittaker, *Tatian*, p.43]

Tatian's "narratives/stories" may well be the Christian Gospels, and his "born in the form of man" is no doubt a reference to the content of these "stories." But if Tatian can seemingly allude to the incarnation in passing this way, why does he not deal with it openly and at length when expounding on the Logos? His comment is hardly a ringing endorsement, or a declaration that such stories are to be accepted as history. The way Tatian compares them to the Greek myths implies that he regards them as being on the same level. Certainly, he does not

rush to point out that the Christian stories are superior or, unlike the Greek ones, factually true. Nor can we get around the fact that he pointedly ignores those Gospel stories in the rest of his Address. Furthermore, he ignores them even though his language seems to imply that the pagans were familiar with them.

We also need to take a close look at Tatian's language, the vocabulary he uses. He speaks with denigration about the stories of the Greek gods, using the word "*muthos*" to refer to them, meaning 'tale, legend, myth, fable.' How is this word used by other Christian writers?

2 Peter 1:16- For we did not cleverly devise fables [*muthois*] when we made known to you...

1 Timothy 4:7 - Have nothing to do with worldly old-wives tales [*muthous*].

2 Timothy 4:4 - They...will turn away their ears from the truth and turn aside to myths [*muthous*],

Titus 1:14 - Pay no attention to Jewish tales [*muthois*] and to the commandments of men who pervert the truth.

Clearly, the word conveys nothing positive in the Christian mind, and this fits with Tatian's tone in applying it to Greek mythology. But how does he refer to the stories of the Christians? The first reference utilizes the neutral "*diegesis*," narrative, account, which can be applied to the Gospel story whether regarded as factual or not. But when he says that "we too tell stories"—literally, "us as similarly myth-tellers" (*muthologountas*)—he uses the same root word, *muthos*, as he used to refer to the Greek myths. How could he let the denigrating connotation inherent in this word stand in application to the Gospels without clarifying how those Gospel accounts were to be taken?

It has been claimed that Tatian's next sentence does that:

We are not foolish, but you talk nonsense.

This would be pretty weak as a defense against the inherent dismissal Tatian has visited upon the Gospels in referring to them as "*mutho*-." Why not simply declare the Greek false and the Christian true? The above statement is not much better than a schoolyard taunt: "You call *us* foolish? *You* are the foolish ones!" If Tatian were concerned with pointing out the superiority of the Christian fables to the Greek ones, or their actual historicity, he was surely capable of doing it in a more sophisticated fashion—and more obviously. He goes into some detail in itemizing the legends of the Greeks, which he accuses of being ridiculous if taken seriously, and he asks how they can mock those of the Christians. A few details itemizing the story of Jesus to demonstrate their non-ridiculous nature would have been in order. It is probably true that Tatian thinks the Greek legends have a greater degree of foolishness, but he has hardly advanced any perceivable case for regarding the Gospel tales as being in an entirely different and superior category—which would certainly be his opinion and his impulse if he were a believer in the historicity of Jesus and the reality of the account of his life.

What Tatian says next is also revealing: "If you tell of the birth of gods, you also represent them as mortal." Here he seems to acknowledge that the Christian

stories do "represent" the birth of a god as being mortal. But his implication is that it is in the same way as do the pagan stories. Since he is not according historical actuality to the former, he is apparently not doing so to the latter either.

Rejecting the Gospel Graft

There seems to be only one way to interpret all this. We can assume that most of the philosopher-apologists had encountered the Gospel story and its figure of Jesus of Nazareth. But with the exception of Justin, they have chosen not to integrate him into their own faith, not to identify this reputed historical founder-teacher with their divine Logos and Son of God, not to regard him as the source of Christian teachings. It is possible that they may not have approved of the Gospel story, particularly the crucifixion, for they have buried not only Jesus but the entire atonement doctrine on which the sacrificial element of Christianity was presumably based; the descriptions they give of their own faith neither needed nor wanted such a crucifixion and atonement. Tatian may have encountered the Gospels through his contact with Justin, but did not follow his mentor's lead until later. Theophilus also gives evidence of knowing "gospels," perhaps even John, but he forbears treating their central character as historical and instead attributes the teachings in them to their "inspired" authors.

This would be possible only if the Logos religion the apologists subscribed to, especially at the time of their conversion, was lacking the figure of Jesus of Nazareth. Only if they could view the Gospel story and its central character as a recent graft, a fictional symbolic tale like those of the Greeks, was it possible for them to reject it, to feel that they could be presenting their Christian faith legitimately. Only if they saw it as possible for pagans to regard the story of Jesus as a myth like their own religious myths, was it acceptable for the apologists to present to them a Christianity which ignored or rejected the figure of Jesus. (This does not exclude many pagans from falling into the same trap as Christians were doing and coming to regard the Gospels as actual history.)

As a mix of Platonism and Hellenistic Judaism, the apologists' branch of Christianity had become prominent throughout the empire in the 2nd century. As we have seen, this Platonic Christianity defined itself in ways which had nothing to do with an historical Jesus. Nor is it likely to have grown out of Paulinism, as they have virtually nothing in common in terms of the cultic sacrificial Christ.

If development had been as scholars present it, a shift in emphasis from the 1st century style of Christianity to one based on Greek philosophy and Hellenistic Judaism, the figure of Jesus would hardly have been dropped; he would have been integrated into the new Platonic picture. This is not a Christian 'utilization' of Greek philosophy. The apologists' faith *is* the religious Platonism of the time brought into a Jewish theological and scriptural setting (which rendered the Logos and the faith "anointed" or "Christian"). It is significant that none of them, possibly excepting Theophilus, have connections with a church.

Such a picture supports the view that Christianity, for its first 150 years, was a mosaic of uncoordinated expressions. It was a variegated organism which took

root and flowered across the landscape of the empire, a widely divergent mix of Jewish and Greek features. As time went on, the distillation of Jesus of Nazareth out of certain pores in this organism spread inexorably across its entire skin, until by the year 200 he was firmly entrenched in every aspect of that body's faith.

The Conversion of Justin

Even Justin Martyr gives evidence of this picture. After reaching Rome in the 140s, he encountered the Gospel story and embraced the historical man-god it told of. In his apologetic writings, penned in the 150s, Jesus and the Gospels occupy center stage. For Justin, the Word/Logos "took shape, became man, and was called Jesus Christ" (Apology 5). But he seems to have left us a record of the nature of the faith he joined before his encounter with the story of a human Jesus.

The Dialogue with the Jew Trypho was written after the Apology, and the latter can be dated to the early 150s. But the action of Trypho (see its first chapter) is set shortly after the Second Jewish Revolt in the 130s, and scholars are confident that this represents the time of Justin's conversion, an event which he describes in the opening chapters.

By the sea at Ephesus Justin encounters an old man, a Christian philosopher. After a discussion of the joys and benefits of philosophy, the old man tells of ancient Jewish prophets who spoke by the Divine Spirit. These prophets, he says, had proclaimed the glory of God the Father and his Son, the Christ (this being the interpretation of the Hebrew bible in Platonic terms). Wisdom could come only to those who have it imparted to them by God and his Christ.

At this, says Justin (8:1),

...a flame was kindled in my soul; and a love of the prophets and of those who are friends of Christ possessed me.

It may seem odd that Justin would not speak of feeling a love for Christ himself. But this is because he had as yet no sense of Christ as a distinct, let alone human, character, an historical man capable of being "loved" as one would love the prophets—no more than Philo would say that he "loved" the Logos with the same emotion and admiration he felt toward Moses. Philo regarded the Logos as an abstraction, and while Justin's and the other apologists' type of Logos may have evolved somewhat beyond this, Justin in his conversion account, and the others in their entire works, express little or no emotion toward the Christ; he is simply a philosophically envisioned aspect of Deity, a part of the Godhead in Heaven.

This Christ is a Savior by virtue of the wisdom he imparts (8:2), an advance over personified Wisdom in the direction of the Logos religion. This is Justin's concept of salvation here, for he goes on to conclude the story of his conversion by saying to Trypho: "If you are eagerly looking for salvation, and if you believe in God, you may become acquainted with the Christ of God and, after being initiated, live a happy life." Later, under the influence of the Gospels, Justin laid increasing emphasis on the redeeming role of Christ's death and resurrection, but

in the basic Logos religion the Son saves by revealing God. For whatever reason, consciously or not, Justin has preserved the actual state of affairs at the time of his conversion and has not contaminated it with later developments in his thinking through encountering the Gospels. In those opening chapters of the Dialogue with Trypho we can see that all the apologists came to the same Christian faith: a Platonic religious philosophy grounded in Hellenistic Judaism which failed to include any historical Jesus.

In Justin's account of his conversion, the philosopher by the sea has not a word to say about Jesus of Nazareth, nor about any incarnation of the Son. In chapter 7 the old man is speaking about "teachers" of the philosophy of body and soul they have been discussing. Justin asks if it is best to employ one, seeing that so many pagan philosophers have, in the old man's view, been deficient in their insights. In answer, the latter points to the Hebrew prophets "who spoke by the Divine Spirit" and foretold events that are now happening. (I will quote from the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* to illustrate a point about translations.)

"They (the prophets) were entitled to credit on account of the miracles which they performed, since they both glorified the Creator, the God and Father of all things, and proclaimed His Son, the Christ [sent] by Him; which, indeed, the false prophets, who are filled with the lying unclean spirit, neither have done nor do, but venture to work certain wonderful deeds for the purpose of astonishing men, and glorify the spirits and demons of error. But pray that, above all things, the gates of light may be opened to you; for these things cannot be perceived or understood by all, but only by the man to whom God and His Christ have imparted wisdom."¹⁹³

Here, in a specific discussion of teachers of the truth, the historical Christ on earth is not mentioned. In fact, the old philosopher has just said, in pointing to the Hebrew prophets, "These *alone* both saw and announced the truth to men" (my emphasis). They have been put forward as the opposite to the deficient pagan philosophers; yet there is no sign of Jesus as the prime example in this regard. The old man has even disparaged "false prophets" who seek to astonish men with miracles without offering a qualification for the miracle-working Jesus.

Trypho himself may be a literary invention, but Justin puts into his mouth (8:6) an intriguing accusation, one which must have represented some prevalent current opinion: "But Christ—if he has indeed been born, and exists anywhere—is unknown...And you, having accepted a groundless report, invent a Christ for yourselves..." (This passage is discussed at length in Appendix 12 [p.696].) Trypho also expresses the opinion that the incarnation is incredible, and even Justin (Apology 13) admits that "sober-minded men" are of the opinion that "Christians are mad to give a crucified man second place to God." As we are about to see, even some Christians agreed.

Minucius Felix: A Smoking Gun

I have left until now the most fascinating of all the apologies, a document which could certainly be called a 'smoking gun.' The little treatise *Octavius* was

written in Rome, or possibly North Africa, in Latin. It takes the form of a debate between Caecilius, a pagan, and Octavius, a Christian, chaired and narrated by the author, Minucius Felix, by whose name the work is now usually referred to.

There has been a long and seesaw debate as to when *Minucius Felix* was written. An evident literary relationship exists with Tertullian's longer Apology, written around the year 200. But who borrowed from whom? A good general rule says that the later writer tends to expand on what the earlier writer wrote, not chop drastically, especially since in this case it would mean that Felix had cut out many important Christian dogmas and every single reference to the Gospel Jesus—and this, well into the 3rd century, when no one else had any qualms about speaking of such things. This and other arguments considered, the earlier dating between 150 and 160 is much preferable. I refer the reader to Appendix 9 (p.685), which takes a close look at the dating of this work.

In this dialogue, the names of Christ and Jesus are never used, though the word "Christian" appears throughout. Nor is there any allusion to the Son or Logos. Octavius' presentation of his Christianity revolves around the Unity and Providence of God and the rejection of all pagan deities, the resurrection of the body and its future reward or punishment. In regard to the latter, no appeal is made to Jesus' own resurrection as proof of God's ability and intention to resurrect the dead. Not even in answer to the challenge (11): "What single individual has returned from the dead, that we might believe it for an example?" Much of Octavius' argument is devoted to countering the calumnies against Christians which Caecilius, representing general pagan opinion, enumerates: everything from debauchery to the devouring of infants, to Christian secrecy and hopes for the world's fiery destruction.

But here is where we encounter a very unusual and dramatic accusation. The list of calumnies by Caecilius (in chapter 9) runs like this (partly paraphrased):

This abominable congregation should be rooted out...a religion of lust and fornication. They reverence the head of an ass...even the genitals of their priests....*And some say that the objects of their worship include a man who suffered death as a criminal, as well as the wretched wood of his cross; these are fitting altars for such depraved people, and they worship what they deserve....*Also, during initiations they slay and dismember an infant and drink its blood...at their ritual feasts they indulge in shameless copulation.

Remember that a Christian is composing this passage. (The sentence in italics is translated in full.) That Christian has included the central element and figure of his supposed faith, the person and crucifixion of Jesus, within a litany of unspeakable calumnies leveled against his religion—with no indication by his language or tone that this reference to a crucified man is to be regarded as in any way different from those other items: disreputable accusations which need to be refuted. Could a Christian author who believed in a crucified Jesus and his divinity really have been capable of this manner of presentation?

In Octavius' half of the debate, he proceeds eventually to the refutation of these slanders. But here are some of the other things he says along the way.

In ridiculing the Greek myths about the deaths of their gods, such as Isis lamenting over the dismembered Osiris, he says (21): "Is it not absurd to bewail what you worship or worship what you bewail?" In other words, he is castigating the Greeks for lamenting and worshipping a god who is slain. Later he says (23): "Men who have died cannot become gods, because a god cannot die; nor can men who are born (become gods)...Why, I pray, are gods not born today, if such have ever been born?" He then goes on to ridicule the whole idea of gods procreating themselves, which would include the idea of a god begetting a son. Elsewhere (20) he scorns those who are credulous enough to believe in miracles performed by gods.

This sort of thing has been encountered in other apologists. How, without any saving qualification, could a Christian put such arguments forward, since they would confute and confound essential Christian beliefs *in his own mind*, and leave himself open to the charge of hypocrisy? It is one thing for the puzzled commentator to claim that silences in the apologists are due to their desire not to discourage or irritate the pagans with long and confusing theological treatises on subjects their readers are prejudiced against, or because they are not aiming to provide a comprehensive picture of the faith. But when an apologist makes statements which flatly contradict and even defame ideas which should be at the very heart of his own beliefs and personal devotion, such explanations are clearly discredited.

How does Felix deal with the accusation that Christians worship a crucified man and his cross? As he did in fashioning Caecilius' diatribe, the author inserts his response into the midst of his refutation of other calumnies about incestuous banquets and adoration of a priest's genitals. Here is the manner and context in which he deals with the charge of worshipping a crucified criminal (chapter 29):

'These and similar indecencies we do not wish to hear; it is disgraceful having to defend ourselves from such charges. People who live a chaste and virtuous life are falsely charged by you with acts which we would not consider possible, except that we see you doing them yourselves. ²Moreover (*nam*), when you attribute to our religion the worship of a criminal and his cross, you wander far from the truth in thinking that a criminal deserved, or that a mortal man could be able, to be believed in as God. ³Miserable indeed is that man whose whole hope is dependent on a mortal, for such hope ceases with his [the latter's] death....

Before going on, we should first note that verse 2, following as it does on the sentiments of verse 1 (which the Latin word "*nam*" emphasizes), makes it clear that the writer regards this accusation as being in the same vein as the other "indecencies" he is at pains to refute. And what is the refutation he provides? It is to heap scorn on those who would believe that a crucified criminal, a mortal, should be worshiped and thought of as a god. Where is the necessary qualification that no Christian could surely have remained silent on? Where is the saving defense that in fact this crucified man was *not* a criminal, *not* a mere mortal, but was indeed God? The general claim is that this is what Felix is

implying, but such an implication would be so opaque it can only be derived by reading it into the text. Octavius' words certainly do not contain it, although they do imply that the writer knows of some Christians who believe such things, but he has no sympathy with them.

It is not a question of whether modern Christian apologists can manage to read allusions and implications into the matter. Could the author himself have thought that his pagan *readers* would be able to? Could he have been any more obscure, any more misleading, in dealing with the central item of the faith? Would the pagan Caecilius see this as a *defense* of the crucified Jesus? If he is going to mention him, why make the defense of him so impenetrable? Those two sentences contain nothing but negative language. "Criminal" is repeated twice, reference to a "mortal man" twice; the believer who hopes on a mortal is "miserable." The mortal man dies and hope ceases. It is impossible to believe that any orthodox Christian apologist would have formulated a response to the charge in this way, that he could expect his pagan readership to understand the hidden qualifications and supposed implications which modern scholars and readers have managed to extract from it. How can Caecilius take from this that the crucified man was *not* a criminal? (In fact, Felix directly refers to him as such.) How will he know that he was instead innocent, that he was *more* than mortal, or that hope *could* be placed in this man because it has not ceased with his death, making the believer in Jesus in no way "miserable"?

H. J. Baylis remarks (*Minucius Felix*, p.97):

There can be nothing more regrettable than the way in which the answer is given to the charge of worshiping a crucified man....An instructed Christian might understand the allusion to the divinity of Christ, but it is certain that the Pagan would at once infer that his direct challenge had been avoided, since general observations about deification had been substituted for the admission or denial that the Christians worshipped Christ crucified.

But even Baylis' "allusion" has been read into the text. Because of an *a priori* certainty that this author, along with all the others, must be orthodox Christian, scholarly studies are devoted to explaining how this can be so in the face of writings that reflect back only fog and distortion.

The translator of this work in the 19th century collection of *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (on which my own translations are based) includes the following in his summary preface at the head of chapter 29: "For they believe not only that he was innocent, but with reason that he was God." Such an idea is nowhere to be found in the text, and nothing can be reasonably said to imply it. To verse 2 the translator offers this wishful footnote: "A reverent allusion to the Crucified, believed in and worshiped as God." What one cannot believe is missing, one will read into the text, no matter what.

A more recent scholar, G. W. Clarke (*Ancient Christian Writers* #39, 1949) makes this observation in an endnote: "A remarkable avoidance of any mention of the Incarnation. Indeed, so anxious is Minucius Felix to avoid admitting such a difficult doctrine that he gives the appearance of denying it."

Indeed he does. And while Clarke compares this to Arnobius' "coyness" on the same topic, this later (c300) Christian apologist was in no way reluctant or dishonest in admitting the doctrine, even though he lived at a time of greater persecution. "We worship one who was born a man. What then? Do you worship no one who was born a man?... But he died nailed to the cross. So what? Neither does the kind and disgrace of the death change his words or deeds" (Against the Heathen, I, 37 & 40). This is the kind of rejoinder we should have every right to expect from the Christian Octavius and do not get.

Octavius goes on in this passage to cite the folly of heathen peoples who *do* "choose a man for their worship," but he makes no such admission for his own Christians. As to the accusation of worshiping crosses, he counters dismissively: "We do not adore them, nor do we wish for them." He goes on to admonish the pagan for accusing the Christians of worshiping crosses as something despicable since, as Octavius points out, the 'sign' of the cross is found throughout nature; even the pagans are guilty of using signs of crosses in their own worship and everyday life. There is not a hint that for Felix the cross bears any sacred significance or requires defending in a Christian context; and if one takes the words to mean what they are saying, he is making an outright denial.

From this refutation of the calumny of Jesus and his cross, he proceeds ("Next...") to challenge those who accuse Christians of the slaughter of children. There is nothing in the way Minucius has dealt with the supposed heart of the Christian faith to differentiate it from all these surrounding horrors.

Not only is the disparaging tone and language unredeemed, there are textual features which render it certain that Felix is expressing rejection of the crucified man. These are given a detailed presentation in Appendix 10 (p.687).

Baylis, in addition to expressing his regret over Felix's response in regard to the crucified man, voices other qualms over the things that Octavius says or does not say. He laments the fact that Felix missed a golden opportunity to refute the charge about licentious feasts and cannibalistic initiation rites by describing the Eucharist; he could have defended, says Baylis, the sacramental significance and pure conduct of this Christian *agape* (love feast) over Jesus' body and blood. He finds it equally "odd" that in speaking of the sources of the "truth about the Godhead" (38), Felix is silent on the teachings of Jesus himself, or Jesus' own status as Son within that Godhead. On Felix's scorning of miracles, he says: "Minucius, strangely enough, seems to be sublimely unconscious of what his dictum would mean if applied to the miracles of Christ."

The survival of this document, with its out-and-out dismissal of the central tenets of Christianity, is perhaps surprising, but it was no doubt possible only because a certain veiled ambiguity could be read into a verse like 29:2 above, and by letting this wishful perception override the derogatory tone and jarring silence of the passage as a whole. Baylis has labeled 29:2 "oblique," but Felix's stark language rules out any such escape route. This scholar, too, reads into Octavius' defense something which is not evidently there: "Yes, we adore one who was crucified, but he is neither a criminal nor a mere man." Those who will

allow historical documents to say what they seem to be saying will recognize that *Minucius Felix* is a true 'smoking gun' pointing to a Christian denial of the historical Jesus.

This is not to say that the author of *Minucius Felix* is necessarily denying the *existence* of the crucified man. Octavius does not say, "there never was such a man," or "the man you claim we worship never existed." He offers no opinion on that aspect of things. But this does not mean that we cannot draw such a conclusion ourselves. If one group calling itself Christian is capable of denying that Christians do or ought to worship a crucified man, it can hardly be the case that the movement began in such a fashion. The author may or may not be aware of other circles which *do* hold to a crucified man as the founder and object of their faith. But if that man *had* existed and had been worshiped as God and Savior throughout the movement, it would be impossible for any Christian writer not to know this and impossible to deny it outright, as Octavius does. If he disagreed with it, he would be forced, having put the accusation in Caecilius' mouth, to acknowledge Jesus' existence and attempt to discredit the negative traditions and claims about him. This would require direct references in the text to the historical man himself. This in no way does the author do. The same argument applies to Octavius' declaration that "we neither worship nor wish for crosses." No Christian could say this if in fact the faith movement began in response to the crucifixion depicted in the Gospels.¹⁹⁴

To the dispassionate eye, *Minucius Felix* is clearly a Christian who will have nothing to do with those in other circles who profess the worship of a Jesus who was crucified in Judea under the governorship of Pontius Pilate, rumors of which have reached pagan ears and elicited much scorn and condemnation. To claim that a whole generation of apologists would falsely convey such an exterior to those they are seeking to win over, that they would deliberately indulge in this kind of Machiavellian deception, is but one of the dubious measures which modern scholarship has been forced to adopt in its efforts to deal with a record that stubbornly refuses to paint the picture all want to see.

There are two minor apologists of the 2nd century (pre-180), Aristides and Quadratus, the latter with only a fragment preserved, which are appealed to as joining Justin on the historicist side. They are quite unlike the ones we have been examining, far less sophisticated in tone and content with almost nothing in the way of Logos philosophy, but presenting Gospel material. A close examination of the former, however, calls its integrity into question. Both are examined in Appendix 11 (p.691): "The Curious Case of the Apology of Aristides."

Defending the Apologists

The apologists were not fools. Their literary and polemical talents were considerable. They were versed in a wide range of ancient knowledge, in the intricate subtleties of contemporary philosophy. That they could design careful and elaborate pieces of apologetic writing that yet deliberately contained such devastating omissions and weaknesses as we have seen is not feasible.

If an author like Felix is being silent for political reasons, he would never have chosen to place in the mouth of his pagan spokesperson accusations concerning the very thing he is deliberately silent on. He would not have allowed the opponent such critical and derogatory declarations about the central object of Christian worship when he has already decided he must deny himself the luxury of answering them. He would hardly have placed in the Christian's *own* mouth, as he does in chapters 21 and 23, sweeping and scornful statements about the pagan gods which at the same time ridiculed elements of the Christian faith with no possibility of offering saving qualifications. There is not even an attempt, through veiled language and implication, to assuage the 'knowing' Christian reader, to show that such saving exceptions are present in his own mind. His uncompromising treatment of these subjects is tantamount to a denial of them.

At the end of *Minucius Felix* the writer portrays his pagan character as converting to Christianity. But what is the point of converting someone like Caecilius to a religion which has had all its essential elements concealed? When Caecilius arrives "on the morrow" for his first lesson as a catechumen, Octavius will be forced to say, "Oh, by the way, there were a few details I left out yesterday." If a Christian makes his appeal to a pagan according to philosophical and logical principles, how will he then turn around and subsequently present the Christian mysteries and dogmas which he must be aware go counter to such principles? His own argumentation stands in danger of being turned against him. His dishonesty will place himself and his faith in a dishonorable light.

It must be stressed that nowhere in the literature of the time is there support for the standard scholarly rationalization about the apologists' silence on the figure of Jesus. Nowhere is it discussed or even intimated that these writers have in fact deliberately left out the essential elements of the Christian faith in their defenses of it for reasons of political correctness or anything else. The account of Origen in the 3rd century occasionally quoted, that he sometimes expounded his ethical views without labeling them as Christian, since he feared his listeners' hostility to the very name of Christianity and Christ, is not applicable here. In such cases Origen was not identifying himself as a Christian at all, he was not offering a defense of Christianity, even in a limited way. If he had been, he would certainly not have left himself open to challenges he was not allowed to answer. His own writings are proof of this. Origen does not conceal Jesus or his resurrection. He counters every scoff and calumny of Celsus with all the resources at his disposal.

This is true also of Tertullian, writing his apology around the year 200 and borrowing, or at least using as inspiration, parts of the work of Minucius Felix. Tertullian indulges in no such cryptic concealment. In his own day, the hostility to Christianity was no easier than it had been a generation or two earlier when Felix wrote, or a mere two decades since Athenagoras and Theophilus had penned their own defenses. Tertullian's work is full of vivid references to Christ's incarnation, to his death and resurrection. Near the end of his account of "that Christ, the Son of God who appeared among us," he declares:

Let no one think it is otherwise than we have represented, for *none may give a false account of his religion* [my emphasis].... We say, and before all men we say, and torn and bleeding under your tortures we cry out, We worship God through Christ! [Apology 21]

Apparently, if we believe modern commentators, the majority of the 2nd century apologists possessed no such conviction, no such courage. Certainly, Tertullian would have had no sympathy with their alleged policy of concealment. The above quotation may even be a veiled condemnation of them, if he were familiar with the works of Athenagoras or Tatian or Theophilus. Or it may have been directed at Minucius Felix himself, whose apology he felt constrained to expand on and fill in the painfully missing blanks. (If Felix were indeed drawing on Tertullian later in the 3rd century, he blatantly ignored Tertullian's admonition.)

As a final note, we might ask: where are the writers (for we might expect there to be some) who openly and in unmistakable words reject the figure of Jesus, with no possibility of ambiguity?—until we realize that no such document would ever have reached us through 2000 years of Christian censorship. Possibly for the same reason, we possess no pagan writing which discusses a case for rejection of the historical Jesus. Even Celsus (who does not do this) survives only piecemeal in Origen's great refutation of him. On the other hand, it is likely that even leading pagan thinkers like Celsus would have had no way to verify or disprove the circulating Christian story and narrative accounts of Jesus of Nazareth, nor would they have possessed the exegetical tools and abilities to disprove Christian claims through a study of the documents themselves. In any case, all of these documents, given the poor state of communication and availability of materials in the ancient world, would hardly have been accessible to someone who might have thought of undertaking such a task.

Conclusion: The Broader Picture of Early Christianity

Those who are accepting of the standard paradigms about the rise and spread of Christianity may find the foregoing picture of the 2nd century apologists a bewildering one. As unlikely as it should seem, the explanation that virtually all these writers were deliberately suppressing the historical Jesus is the only one available which could preserve the integrity of the orthodox picture, and thus generations of scholarship have turned a blind eye on all the problems and incongruities which that alleged explanation produces. But those problems are eliminated if we let the documentary record speak for itself, and that requires us to formulate a very different picture of Christianity and its diverse expressions.

I have repeatedly referred to the faith of the apologists as a "Logos religion" developed on a foundation involving the Jewish God and Jewish scriptures—and lacking an historical Jesus. It must be emphasized, however, that this does not put it into the same category as the cultic Christ of Paul. There is more to the wider Christian picture than a simple dichotomy between an historical Jesus and a heavenly Christ. The forms of non-historicist faith among the apologists we have examined should not be regarded as belonging to a Pauline-type mythical

Jesus. Theophilus & Co. do not have any Jesus or Christ at all. Their Son/Logos is a heavenly entity, but not in the same way as that of the epistles. He is not a sacrificial salvific figure, a descending divine being with a distinct character of his own, although he is reminiscent of those rival faiths Paul rails against for preaching "another Jesus" and not having a theology of "Christ crucified." (The Epistle to Diognetus seems to be somewhere in a grey middle.)

No one among the apologists declares that they have a Son who operates as a redeemer in the heavens. Rather, they have a Logos who is a creative force and revealing emanation of God; to that extent, such a Logos could be said to be a 'mythical' entity, in that it is part of the spiritual dimension and a primary cog in the workings of the Godhead. Minucius Felix does not even have this, or at least he ignores it as being inessential to his purposes. If they all style themselves "Christian" in one way or another, it is through the significance of the word in terms of the Jewish concept of the "Anointed" which, translated into the Greek "*Christos*," exercised an attraction serving many different expressions in those two formative centuries. All were at their foundation expressions of the ground-bass concept of the intermediary Son.

Although Philo of Alexandria was building to some extent on predecessors, he is a handy figure from which we can trace a theoretical line of development (though not one confined to him) from the beginnings of an intermediary Son philosophy to a Logos religion in the 2nd century. The latter has bypassed or ignored the paraphernalia that has been attached to it in other quarters and taken its own place on the 2nd century stage, capable of presenting itself to the emperors and pagans in general as the proper "Christian" religion. The essence of it is the Logos as revealer, the intermediary channel to God, enabling one to be "saved." As Justin has put it in relating his conversion experience: "If you are eagerly looking for salvation, and if you believe in God...you may become acquainted with the Christ of God, and, after being initiated, live a happy life." Justin's 'initiation' no doubt refers to a rite of admission, probably a baptism.

An expression of that religion is found not only in the well-known apologists of the 2nd century, but in a little document lurking lonely and largely ignored on the sidelines in most examinations of the documentary record: the *Discourse to the Greeks* erroneously attributed by ancient commentators to Justin Martyr. It epitomizes the two elements I have accorded to the 2nd century circles we can see represented by the apologists. The first four chapters are devoted to a strong denunciation of the divine mythologies of the pagans and the immorality they give rise to. The fifth and final chapter offers the alternative:

Henceforth, ye Greeks, come and partake of incomparable wisdom, and be instructed by the Divine Word, and acquaint yourselves with the King immortal....For our own Ruler, the Divine Word [logos], who even now constantly aids us, does not desire strength of body and beauty of feature, nor yet the high spirit of earth's nobility, but a pure soul, fortified by holiness, and the watchwords of our King, holy actions, for through the Word power passes into the soul....The Word exercises an influence which does not make

poets: it does not equip philosophers nor skilled orators, but by its instruction it makes mortals immortal, mortals gods; and from the earth transports them to the realms above Olympus. Come, be taught; become as I am, for I, too was as ye are. These have conquered me—the divinity of the instruction, and the power of the Word....the Word drives the fearful passions of our sensual nature from the very recesses of the soul....Lust being once banished, the soul becomes calm and serene. And being set free from the ills in which it was sunk up to the neck, it returns to Him who made it. For it is fit that it be restored to that state whence it departed, whence every soul was or is. [ANF]

This is hardly speaking of Jesus of Nazareth. The Word/Logos is an entirely spiritual entity, worthy of worship: not the bowing-down kind, but a reverence of morality, guidance and perfection, and a knowledge of the true and estimable God. While the Logos has become more personalized, this is a natural outgrowth of Philonic philosophy, and it is in the same vein as so much of what we find in the apologists, including aspects of Justin. Chapter 10 of Book 2 of Theophilus is a thorough definition of the Logos along the lines of Greek philosophy but with an input from Jewish personified Wisdom (he quotes from Proverbs). This exalted description of a cosmic Son and Word—"the Spirit of God begat within God's own bowels, a helper in the things created by Him, governing principle who is Lord of all things fashioned by himself"—not only lacks an identification with a Jesus of Nazareth, it would strike any reader as ludicrous to encounter such an identification of this divine spirit force with a human man.

For these believers, the Logos was the antidote to the base mythology of paganism. Remember that this broad trend of belief is rooted in Judaism, appealing to Jewish concepts and especially the scriptures. Apologist after apologist says that it was the Jewish scriptures that determined their beliefs and orientation, and that led to their conversion (thus identifying themselves as being ethnically non-Jewish, though there may well have been Jews in the movement). Thus the adoption of a term like "Christ" and "Christ-follower" (Christian, as Theophilus defines it in relation to 'anointing') would be in keeping with that foundation. It has become a widely-used term for the Logos in the movement as a whole. It is part of many of its members' inherent opposition to their own pagan traditions and especially to the mythology of their traditional gods. This is why the most prominent aspect of so many apologetic writings is an attack on the old Greek and Roman mythology. The Logos-followers have an undying disdain for it all. Not only do they see it as ridiculous, it compromises morality and intellectual integrity. They would like nothing better than to pull down the whole rotten structure. To replace it, they offer the Jewish God, but he is a God that can only be approached and understood through the Logos, the "intermediary Son," and thus the Logos itself becomes a central object of faith and even worship.

They may also see themselves as preserving (with the exception of Justin, who succumbed to the Gospel lure) a purity which others within the broader 'Christ' movement were in the process of adulterating in a crude historicism. Minucius Felix heaps scorn on those who place their faith in a crucified mortal

and his cross. Tatian relegates the Gospels to the category of "stories" on the same level as the Greek myths, although he later seems to have gone down the same path as Justin did. (On the other hand, we cannot be certain that even in composing the *Diatessaron* he had come around to regarding such a story as historical.) Unfortunately, the historicism to which all eventually succumbed has forever hamstrung western culture. The irony is that such Logos believers adamantly condemned pagan mythology with its stories of the gods' and heroes' activities, not only leading to a perception of immorality but obscuring the purity and perfection of the one true God—and yet other circles of Christianity were in the process of evolving into a dominant form which fell into the same trap. It turned its mythology into literal history and adopted every word and deed of its human Jesus as fact and guide, setting them in concrete. Since there is a wealth of dross among the few Gospel pearls, the western world inherited bigotry, inquisition, superstition, rigid fundamentalism, rejection of the world and the body, intellectual ignorance and suppression of science, hatred of Jews and non-believers, a Church as a corrupt and repressive institution, and a host of other albatrosses that we have been struggling to remove from our necks after a reign of many centuries.

It is impossible to know how widespread was this 'Logos religion' or the extent of its contact with or knowledge of other brands of Christ belief and developing orthodoxy. We do not know membership figures even for the latter at any given point in the first few centuries, and scholarly calculations vary widely. Lacking any overall study of all this diversity by anyone at the time, we cannot say whether the Ignatiuses outnumbered the Odists, whether historicists trumped the Jesus mythicists or Logos worshipers, whether Pauline theology enjoyed a greater following than Gnostic mysticism. Among the apologists (and probably others like them whose works do not survive), being essentially a philosophical circle, the numbers may have been relatively low. Even Justin does not discuss a church, but speaks of a "president" of the assembly in which they gather for a communal meal (Apology 65). We do not have to see populous social networks behind those half dozen surviving works. And as the later 2nd century progressed, a good portion of such groups would have fallen under the Gospel influence as Justin did; the rest simply passed out of sight. Ironically, the apologies which did survive were those which happened to be encountered and commandeered by the orthodox Church and reinterpreted for themselves, just as they did the epistles.

It may be that no pockets of the cultic Christ faith survived by the latter 2nd century either. They had evolved into historical Jesus faiths; or they had morphed into the Gnostic sects who now placed a foot in both camps, turning their spiritual Savior into a docetic one and melding him with an adopted historical figure, largely under the influence of the Gospels. The philosopher-apologists of the 2nd century belonged to a religious thread in which the Son was not a Jesus-Savior figure but an abstract heavenly force, a part of God. As such, they would not have raised the ire of heresy hunters like Irenaeus, for whom they may have blended into the general philosophical background. If they never

presented a Jesus Christ, there should have been no reason for the heresiologists to especially remark on them. Besides, the latter's attentions were occupied by the vast Gnostic flood which threatened to inundate their fledgling orthodoxy.

If the documentary record of the first century and a half is examined without preconceptions, one finds a remarkable diversity of theologies and soteriologies of abstract, revealer, and sacrificial entities; different blends of philosophy and religion, with varying reliance on the Jewish scriptures and traditions. Once the fundamental idea of the intermediary Son was established, it could be carried in all sorts of directions, limited only by a given thinker's, or a given sect's, imagination, prompted by scripture or any other precedents or elements in the philosophies of the day, in one's own or neighboring cultures.

One finds a telling disconnectedness, except in a few very general ways, between all these manifestations which often coexisted at the same time, each with its particular origins obscured behind the horizon of their earliest record. (We can only guess at the specific genesis of the Pauline Christ cult and the Jerusalem group). Beside them thrived Jewish non-mainstream sects with their own blends of faith and expectation, and there were similar groups among the Greeks and Romans. Again one can appeal to John Dillon's fortuitous phrase, "a seething mass of sects and salvation cults" (*The Middle Platonists*, p.396). But seething masses are a great seedbed of syncretism. That is essentially what almost all forms of "Christianity" were: a wedding of Jewish and Greek concepts and trends of thinking. In principle, we do not have to see such trends and developments as the product of any single person. They arise out of the conditions and mindsets of the times, thinkers and groups absorbing what lies in the air around them and evolving new expressions of those ideas.

In the ancient world, communication was primitive; the preservation and transmission of writings was a fragile affair. Documents like that of Theophilus and Athenagoras are not attested to sometimes for centuries after their allotted dates; the early documentary record of the Christianity we know often shows a seeming ignorance on the part of one circle for another until the Church roped them all together. There was no Internet to present the opportunity of viewing and understanding this riotous mix. Paradoxically, we today have a better vantage point upon it, but we are hamstrung by the weight of two millennia of imposed interpretation which, like a determined meme, still directs our vision with a view to its own survival.

When much of that great diversity coalesced into a common faith, much understanding of the past was lost. The Gospels came to impose themselves over the whole conglomeration. If later commentators came to view an apologist like Theophilus as a great writer and defender of their own faith, it was because they read that faith into what the apologists were saying and overlooked what they were not saying, just as the later Church misread Paul and saw in his Christ Jesus the human man they now believed in.

Christianity still pursues that chimera today.

IV : THE EXTERNAL EVIDENCE

Part Eleven

THE NON-CHRISTIAN WITNESS TO JESUS

32

Jesus Among Pagan and Jew

I: The Pagan Witness

After the silence on Jesus in the earliest Christian documents themselves, the silence in so many non-Christian writings of the time may seem anti-climactic, but it is an important corroborative element within the puzzle picture. Even when references to Jesus start to appear within both Jewish and Roman writings, these can be seen to be unreliable or inconclusive.

Much of the Gospel story has been relegated to fiction by recent critical scholarship, but if a genuine Jesus existed and had an impact which set the beginnings of a world religion in motion, one would have to presume that some features of his career, climaxing in an execution in Jerusalem, would have some basis in reality. Otherwise, the rise of Christianity as it is traditionally viewed would be inexplicable.

Consequently, for historians of the time, Jesus and the religion he began should have constituted a noteworthy event in the period of the early emperors. It is difficult to believe that he would have escaped the attention of at least some commentators. Nor was Palestine merely a backwater part of the empire, whose happenings were of no interest to those living beyond its borders. The land of the Jews lay in a strategic location on the route to Egypt. It was part of the bulwark against the hostile Parthians to the east. Its troubles seemed unending and its rebellious spirit must have been the source of many an imperial sleepless night on the Palatine. The two Jewish Wars which the empire fought to put down that rebellious spirit were among Rome's heaviest military campaigns during the entire era. (The conquest of the Jews, as one historian put it, "was no walk in the park.") In the half century of escalating turmoil leading to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE, Judea was under a spotlight whose glare lighted up the eastern empire.

We should also remember that the Jews were a presence in their day unlike any other. Their Diaspora communities extended to every major city and many smaller ones. As a social group the Jews tended to keep themselves separate and consequently visible. Many of them maintained close ties with their homeland. The religion of the Jews was a focal point of interest in much of pagan society, and whether they were expressing admiration, resentment or ridicule, things Jewish were a going topic for many a Roman writer, poet and satirist.

Noticing Jesus

Paul Eddy and Gregory Boyd, in their apologetic work *The Jesus Legend*, ask (p. 167-8): "Would pagan writers have noticed Jesus?" How significant is the fact that virtually no non-Christian sources mention Jesus? While seeking to retain at least *something* of Jesus' Gospel reputation for miracle working as rooted in reality, they nevertheless attempt to downplay the possibility of such a reputation spreading very far. They compare him to other political and religious figures of the time in Palestine and suggest that Jesus was, for many, simply another "voice in the crowd." And yet, if anything spreads faster among a population of all classes, it is the rumor that a man is going about performing dramatic healings, especially if those reports are exaggerated, as they tend to be. The Gospels are presumably a witness to exactly that kind of situation, and Christian writers for centuries simply assumed that Jesus' reputation would have been widely known. Eusebius invented a letter (or was taken in by a crass forgery, complete with reply by Jesus) from the Edessan king Abgar to Jesus, begging him to come and cure his own ailment. Moreover, the Roman occupation was throughout the 1st century careful to keep its finger on the pulse of popular moods and movements, and there can be little doubt that Jesus of Nazareth would quickly have come to their attention. Josephus' accounts of some of those other "voices in the crowd" and the Romans' rapid and vicious responses to them, show that such figures were attention-getters.

Eddy and Boyd further suggest that Roman historians and writers, even if they had heard about Jesus, would have had no particular reason to be interested in him. In some cases this may be true, but in others, as we shall see, it is not, and the sheer number of 1st and early 2nd writers who are silent undermines their argument, for we might expect that some, no matter how few, would have chanced to give us some mention of him and his reputation. The handful that are alleged to do so, all of them starting from the very end of the century and continuing into the next, are without exception problematic.

John P. Meier (*A Marginal Jew*, vol.1, p.56) makes the point that the people of the time, especially after Jesus' death, would more likely have been aware of the movement itself rather than its putative founder. And yet the silence extends even to Christians as a new force having an impact around the empire, leading one to doubt even the traditions of the spread and development of Christianity as it moved supposedly from Palestine outward. The Roman historian Tacitus seemingly tells of a dramatic persecution of Christians under Nero, an event

which should speak to a high profile for the movement as early as the 60s and as far away as Rome. And yet for centuries no one but Tacitus recounts this persecution, not even Christians themselves. And he is the first pagan writer in which a reference to Christ is found—a full half-century after that event. Meier opines: "The wonder is that any learned Jew or pagan would have known or referred to him at all in the 1st or early 2nd century." If so, he has cast doubt on the few that are claimed to do so during that period. And it goes without saying that if Jesus were the actual Son of God, such a situation as Meyer and many others are forced to have recourse to would call the whole business into question.

All Quiet on the Roman Front

If among the Greco-Roman writers—historians, philosophers, satirists—we begin our quest for the non-Christian witness to Jesus, the pickings are extremely slim. The first century philosopher Seneca (died 65 CE), the greatest Roman writer on ethics in his day, has nothing to say about Jesus or Christianity—even though Christians after Constantine made Seneca a secret convert to the faith and invented correspondence between himself and Paul. A little later, the Stoic philosopher Epictetus (c55-c135) espoused a "brotherhood of man" doctrine, aiming his message at the poor and humble masses (he was a former slave himself). But he had apparently not heard of his Jewish precursor; the historian Arrian preserved some of Epictetus' lectures but records no mention of Jesus. Book IV of his *Discourses* contains a bare remark about "Galileans" who meet death fearlessly, but we cannot be sure if this refers to Christians who preferred to die rather than sacrifice to the emperor, or to Jewish Zealots in their political struggles with Rome. Nor does Epictetus' reference to "Galileans," if this means Christians, tell us anything as to whether the object of their worship was mythical or historical. His ethical views are so like those imputed to Jesus that some older scholars, such as Douglas Sharp in 1914 (*Epictetus and the New Testament*, p. 136) seriously questioned whether he might have been a Christian.

In his witty epigrams, the satirist Martial (died c103) depicts the most diverse characters of his contemporary Rome, but Christians who believe in the divinity of a crucified Jewish preacher are not among them. Martial's younger colleague Juvenal (died 138), a poet of broader and more bitter invective, also gives us a vivid picture of the foibles and fools of the empire's capital in his day, but he has no barbs for Christians either. R. T. France (*The Evidence for Jesus*, p.20) remarks: "The Jews, among whom Jesus lived and died, were a strange, remote people, little understood and little liked by most Europeans of the time, more often the butt of Roman humor than of serious interest." Since the early Christian movement is usually judged to have been indistinguishable from the Jews from the outsider's point of view, France has given us good reason to expect that satirists would have been only too willing to ridicule the dust-up within Judaism over this failed Messiah and what had since been made of him.

The first of the satirists to pillory Christians is Lucian (and he lived and wrote in the Mesopotamian east, not in Rome), who in the 160s wrote *On the Death of*

Peregrinus in which he mocks them for their gullibility in accepting beliefs "without any sure proof." Here he refers to "him whom they still revere, the human fellow who was crucified in Palestine for introducing this novel cult to the world." He scoffs at their worship of this "crucified sophist." By this time the Gospels were in circulation, and many non-Christians can be presumed to have become familiar with what certain Christians now believed about their origins. Thus, any information revealed by Lucian is, especially at this late date, almost certainly to be seen as derived from Christian tradition itself.¹⁹⁵

There were other Roman and Greek writers of the 1st and early 2nd centuries who failed to mention Jesus. Books by past mythicists and modern Internet sites often list them. Besides those already looked at, there was Plutarch, a prolific writer around the beginning of the 2nd century who wrote biographies of notable figures; he wrote on ethical issues, public life, savior god mythology. He had a serious interest in religious minutiae. He was a priest at Delphi, and in that post he wrote on the theory of prophecy, on the nature of the soul and its fate after death, on 'philosophy with theology as its goal.' David Russell, in *The Oxford History of the Classical World*, (p.670), writes of Plutarch:

More than any of the other authors we have here selected for consideration, he is a witness to the deepening religious and theological consciousness of the age.

And yet this eclectic, wide-ranging thinker and writer seems never to have encountered a word about Jesus or even the Christian movement. Until his death around 120, he was apparently unaware of both.

An earlier Roman writer should also have had reason to mention Christ and Christians, but for entirely different reasons. We will look later at Pliny the Younger, but his uncle Pliny the Elder was like Plutarch a voluminous writer, mostly on natural history. He compiled reports on all forms of phenomena in nature, such as eruptions, earthquakes and astronomical events. (He was to meet his death by suffocation when he ventured too close to observe erupting Vesuvius in 79 CE.) In Book Two of his *Natural Histories*, he embarks on a description of the cosmos, the seven planets and their motions. Beginning at chapter 25, he moves on to "celestial prodigies," comets and the history and circumstances of their appearances, many associated with the births and deaths of famous figures, "flaming torches" (meteorites) regarded as omens or as marking important events, and other heavenly manifestations. While maintaining a reporter's objectivity, of some he seems skeptical. Certainly, more than one would have been merely unfounded reports, as when (ch. 32) he records that during the consulship of Cn. Domitius and C. Fannius, three moons appeared in the night sky at once. If Christian traditions had existed in the mid-1st century about an unusual moving star in the east, or a world-wide darkness for three hours at midday—let alone had the actual occurrence of these events taken place—one can be quite confident that Pliny would have recorded them. (He discusses eclipses of the sun and moon, but as these were recurring natural events he does not provide a detailed log of their occasions and locations.)

Aelius Aristides, perhaps the foremost Greek orator of his day (mid 2nd century) committed to writing 55 of his Orations. He was also throughout his life a victim of chronic illnesses, which led him to devote much attention to Aesclepius, Greek god of healing, and to write a series of "Sacred Tales" (*Hieroi Logoi*) in which he recounted the vicissitudes of his own health problems and observations about healing, especially through supernatural agencies. Some of his Orations contain stories about the sick being cured in pagan temples. We might have expected that a writer and traveler of his sort would encounter Christians and their traditions about their own great healer god, especially if he had been on earth in recent history, perhaps even be led to sound out such a god for the benefit of his own health. But he is silent on such things.

The satirists Persius and Petronius in the mid 1st century are silent, as are the historians Appian and Arrian, the author of "miscellaneous erudition" on philosophy and religion Aulus Gellius, the Greek geographer and traveler Pausanias (all from the early 2nd century), Dio of Prusa of the late 1st century who wrote on popular moral philosophy, and various writers on the philosophy of the Stoics. Many others, who individually may not have been equally likely to mention Jesus, collectively fail to do so. Virtually the entire age seems to be ignorant of his existence.

Celsus

A pagan figure whom both Eddy and Boyd (*op.cit.*, p. 177-8) and Robert Van Voorst (*Jesus Outside the New Testament*, p.64-9) focus on deserves some consideration here. The Greek Platonic philosopher Celsus is the first recorded critic of Christianity who undertook a detailed literary challenge to the Christian movement and its beliefs. His work itself, *Alethes Logos* (True Doctrine), does not survive—not surprisingly, since Christians would never have preserved it, just as they utterly destroyed other similarly critical writings such as that of Porphyry in the following century. Celsus' work survives in a fashion, however, in Origen's great rebuttal to him (*Contra Celsum* in 8 books) in which he quotes many of Celsus' passages, so many that much of the work can be reconstructed. Celsus had clearly read more than one Gospel and various other Christian writings, and had learned much concerning Christian beliefs about Jesus, no doubt including from Christians themselves. Since he wrote late in the 170s, there would have been considerable material and contemporary tradition among Christians and others to draw from.

Regrettably, that was *all* that he had to draw from. Dissenters against Jesus mythicism regularly voice the objection that Celsus is a prime example of how opponents of Christianity never raised the question of Jesus' non-existence, never challenged the new religion on that basis. Eddy and Boyd (*op.cit.*, p. 178) follow the same misplaced device in objecting that Celsus and other critics failed to employ the argument that Jesus never existed.

While we cannot be sure that at an earlier time such a challenge was not raised, any written work of that nature would never have come down to us, just

as Celsus' own work has not except for the good fortune of being addressed by Origen. Moreover, we have seen that the 2nd century apologists almost to a man do not themselves mention an historical Jesus and even constitute evidence against him. So we cannot look to them for any rebuttal similar to Origen's against earlier challenges to Jesus' existence. By the time we reach Celsus, there would have been little or no option for a pagan challenger than to accept what Christians were saying about their presumed founder, no reason even to question it. As Van Voorst puts it (*op.cit.*, p.68), "Celsus' main attack on Christianity is philosophical, not historical." If there had been an earlier literary challenge to the veracity of Jesus of Nazareth, not to have come across such a document which could have pointed Celsus in that direction would not be surprising. On the other hand, no notable challenge to the Gospels was likely to have preceded Celsus, since those Gospels did not gain any circulation we can detect even in Christian circles before the second quarter of the 2nd century. Nor would Celsus or any other pagan writer have possessed the means or skills to derive a conclusion of Jesus' non-existence from the Christian documents and other sources, such as we have and can do today.

Celsus does not convey the impression that he was all that sophisticated or subtle a thinker. His challenge to Christianity, as Eddy and Boyd put it, was "intensely polemical—often resorting to caricature and lampooning." In other words, not too impressive in a scholarly way. Celsus denigrates Jesus' miracle-working abilities, suggesting they were fraudulent crafts which he picked up in Egypt. He claims to repeat Jewish slander against Jesus' mother, that she had given birth through adultery with a soldier, something which her son tried to cover up by concocting a claim of his own virgin birth. Meier (*op.cit.*, p.223-4) points out that such a Jewish slander is not attested to two decades earlier in Justin's Dialogue with Trypho, and is found among Diaspora Jews, those with whom Celsus would have come in contact. Thus, the Jewish accusation he seems to report, if that was the case, is likely to have been simply in response to a Gospel account of Jesus' virgin birth, not dependent on some earlier Jewish rejoinder in Palestine that might have arisen in the 1st century. As Meier puts it:

The Diaspora rather than Palestinian origin of the parody makes it very unlikely that we have here in Celsus a scrap of historical information preserved intact among Jews 'underground' for a century and a half. Indeed, if one were to take the account as historical, one would have to press some basic questions of traditions history: How did (presumably hostile) Jews learn of the circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus, when Jesus would not have come to the attention of the Jewish public until he was around thirty years old, long after the supposed events had transpired in an obscure Galilean village called Nazareth? How was such knowledge preserved over many decades in Palestinian Judaism, only to be transferred at some point to Diaspora Judaism? The whole scenario strains belief.

This kind of critical judgment should be brought to a whole range of standard claims about the various 'witnesses' to Jesus. The bottom line here is that Celsus

gives no indication that he can be pressed into providing an historically-based evidence for Jesus' existence. (Further consideration of that Celsus passage in Origen will be offered later, when looking at the rabbinic literature.)

In regard to Trypho and the alleged failure of opponents of Christianity to appeal to the argument that Jesus never existed, there is a passage in Justin's Dialogue over which debate exists as to whether Trypho is giving indication of a contemporary Jewish denial of an historical Jesus. I refer the reader to Appendix 12 (p.696) for a discussion.

II: The Jewish Witness

Does the Jewish side of the non-Christian record fare any better?

Philo of Alexandria

The Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria lived and wrote into the 40s of the 1st century. The foremost city of Egypt (and second in the empire) had the largest Jewish community outside Palestine. It was a center of Jewish learning, much of it reflecting the absorption of Hellenistic philosophy. Philo himself adapted Middle Platonism to the Hebrew bible and created an allegorical picture of the universe and its workings. Alexandrian Jewish philosophy was, if not the father, the paternal uncle of much Christian thinking about the spiritual Christ. Philo was a mystic and not at all apocalyptically oriented, but the mythological transformation to which Christians are presumed to have subjected Jesus of Nazareth should not have failed to catch his attention over the 10 to 20 years he would have lived past the crucifixion.

Since so little other than Philo has survived of Alexandrian Jewish thinking at the turn of the era, it is difficult to know whether he was much of an innovator, or whether he simply epitomized developing ideas of his time. (The notable Philonic scholar of the early 20th century, E. R. Goodenough, was of the latter opinion.) But in his hands, the idea of the divine Logos as an impersonal emanation of God was brought to the very threshold of becoming a personalized entity essentially separate from God, an hypostatization, capable of being loved and worshiped and accorded a role as a willing redemptive agent.

Here we can indicate in greater detail the essence of his thinking in regard to the Logos. Drawing on Goodenough's *Introduction to Philo Judaeus* (p.99-102):

Everywhere in Philo's writings appears this machinery of mediation....The most important single formulation of this mediation is in terms of the Logos and Powers of God, which represent God in his dealings with the world....'The Logos was conceived in God's mind before all things and is manifest in connection with all things'....That is, the One God gives forth a Stream from himself, the first representation of which is the Logos, most like God because it is the primal emanation....Similarly, since the Logos is a projection of divine reality and being, it can be called God, and all the workings of the Logos can be called the acts or works of God.

It can be no surprise that later Christian thinkers were amazed to find that concepts like this were held by a philosopher who had essentially predated Jesus. The nature and role of Jesus, especially in the Gospel of John, was encapsulated in Philo's writings on the Logos. It is a description of the Pauline Christ without the name—with neither one of them having an earthly incarnation. (Philo has the Logos force residing in the historical figure of Moses but this does not constitute a divine incarnation.)¹⁹⁶

This "Christ before Christianity" found in Philo led later Christians to enlist him into the movement as best they could. Frank Zindler, in his *The Jesus the Jews Never Knew* (p. 15-24), presents a picture of this forced 'incorporation into Christian history' by Eusebius and Jerome. Philo went to Rome as the head of an embassy to the emperor Gaius (37-41 CE) on behalf of the Alexandrian Jews, but by Eusebius' time a second trip during the reign of Claudius (41-54) had entered Christian tradition, a visit in which Philo "became acquainted at Rome with Peter" (*The History of the Church*, 2.17). So impressed was Philo with the Christians and their way of life, Eusebius tells us, that years later he wrote "On a Contemplative Life," an account "of the life of our ascetics."

This work of Philo has in fact been dated to much earlier in his life. It tells of an ascetic group (Zindler styles it a monastic order) called the Therapeutae, a sect principally found in Egypt, but also, says Philo, in the Greek world and beyond. As summarized by Goodenough, the Therapeutae

meet for the sacred meal every Sabbath, clad in white garments, their hands concealed under their robes, consuming the most holy food, bread, salt and hyssop, after they had feasted spiritually upon allegorical commentary on the sacred Laws. [*By Light, Light*, p.262]

The Therapeutae realize the ideal life of the Patriarchs and take God alone as their guide; they renounce all property. Eusebius takes this as "clearly and indisputably" an account of early Christians in Egypt, perhaps without noticing that none of it contains any reference to Jesus. Jerome later in the 4th century follows suit, making Philo a friend to St. Mark in Alexandria and identifying the Therapeutae as Christians who "dwell in every province of the empire." (Here we can see yet another justification for doubting the reliability of later Christian traditions.)

Such Christian assumptions and inventions demonstrate how a philosopher like Philo, writing of God's intermediary Son and communities like that of the Therapeutae, would be fully expected not only to have encountered Christ and Christians but to have written of them, and thus to serve as a witness to Jesus and Christianity. From our vantage point, we can see that, holding the beliefs and interests that he did, Philo, who lived perhaps two decades beyond the reputed life of Jesus, would certainly not have ignored him had any word of movement or founder reached him. Such word would definitely have seized Philo's avid attention.

Would such word have been likely to reach him? We know that he did make at least one visit to Jerusalem during his life (it was just around the corner of the

eastern Mediterranean), and we can tell from his works that he knew of things going on in his Jewish homeland. Indeed, he was well-versed in the career and character of Pontius Pilate and the trouble which that governor had caused in Judea. In his *On the Embassy to Gaius* (38/299-305), Philo gives a detailed account of the furor in Jerusalem over Pilate's attempted introduction of the Roman shields, much longer (and 30 years earlier) than Josephus' own account of the event which now precedes the *Testimonium* in his *Antiquities of the Jews*. (Somehow, the trouble that followed Pilate's execution of Jesus of Nazareth escaped his attention.) Moreover, members of Philo's family had business in Palestine, a nephew even becoming Judea's governor in 46 CE. And if any of the prodigies associated with Jesus' death had actually occurred, he could not have failed to become aware of them.

By the time we get to Photius in the 9th century, Philo has become, according to a Christian story, a Christian. All this of someone who is completely silent on the figure of Jesus.

Justus of Tiberias

Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople in the 9th century, is a witness to another silence on the part of a near-contemporary of Jesus. Justus of Tiberias was a Jewish historian writing in Galilee around the year 80. His work, *The Chronicles of the Kings of the Jews*, was read by Photius for his grand review *Bibliotheca* of several hundred ancient books. As Zindler puts it (*op.cit.*, p. 15):

Obviously disappointed by the work, Photius sadly recorded that "of the advent of Christ, of the things that befell him one way or another, or of the miracles that he performed, [Justus] makes absolutely no mention" [*Codex 33, my translation*]. The crucially positioned historian clearly had never heard of Jesus, his disciples, St. Paul, nor any of the earth-shattering New Testament events that are supposed to have happened on his turf.

The early 20th century mythicist Arthur Drews (*Witnesses to the Historicity of Jesus*, p.3) makes allowance for the fact that Justus' *Chronicle* was relatively brief. Yet it remains the case that Jesus is reputed to have conducted his ministry in places very close to Justus' home city, and if he had created an impact upon the region anything like that conveyed by the Gospels, he should have come to the historian's attention. As Drews points out, Photius himself expected mention of Jesus in Justus' work and was taken aback that he found none. That Justus nowhere in any of his works mentioned Jesus is corroborated by the very fact that they have been lost. Had he done so, Zindler observes, they would likely have enjoyed preservation, as in the case of Josephus.

Jewish Rabbinical Writings

If there were any area in which we should expect to find an independent memory of Jesus of Nazareth preserved, it would be among the Jewish rabbis. The Pharisees are an ever-present hostile force to Jesus in the Gospels, and they alone of all the variegated political classes of pre-70 Israel survived the Jewish

War and directed the future of a stateless Judaism. Their long tradition of oral transmission should have ensured that comment and controversy surrounding Jesus in his lifetime and its immediate aftermath would be passed on and form a core of knowledge we could draw on when it was fully written down.

The changeover to preserving in writing the formerly oral rabbinic tradition took place shortly after 200 CE. The earliest body of such literary recording is known as the *Mishnah*, completed within a few years. It was a compendium of the oral Law supposedly granted to the Jews alongside the written Pentateuch, to be passed down over the centuries with commentary by rabbis of the "Tannaitic" period (1st century BCE to the end of the 2nd century CE). Over the following century or so, a second collection of written commentary took shape, known as the *Tosefta* ("Additions"), preserving further material from the Tannaitic period that had not been included in the *Mishnah*. Such codifications were carefully organized, divided into *seders* ('orders'), tractates, sections and paragraphs. The latter are called "*baraita*" (equivalent to New Testament "pericopes"), individual units of teaching circulating independently before being brought into the various written collections.

Eventually, two great commentaries ("*Gemara*") grew up around the *Mishna* and *Tosefta*, a cumulative compilation of centuries of discussions in the rabbinic academies of Palestine and Babylonia. These are called the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds, the latter being four times larger than the former and becoming much more influential throughout the Jewish world. The Palestinian Talmud was completed in Tiberias around the year 400; the Babylonian Talmud about a century later. Both collections are built around a core of *Mishnah* and *Tosefta* elements, expanding and redacting them. This evolution of the individual units is essential to understanding and evaluating the alleged references to Jesus in this literature.

While we can roughly date the various collections, dating a point of interest in any particular component is difficult; usually a rabbi who is quoted can be dated, but this does not always clarify a date for the reference he was making. There is very little in the way of direct historical data in any of it. Certain historical figures and events emerge only incidentally as a way of throwing light on more important concerns: the elucidation and application of Jewish theology, law and customs, an exercise in self-understanding and preservation in an era of dispersal and instability. And in such history as there is, virtually none relates to the pre-70 CE period, about which scholars often comment that the rabbis seem to have had a deficient understanding.

When this literature spread over four centuries is surveyed, we find a number of passages which have been variously regarded by Christian commentators as referring to Jesus, from the just possible, to the probable, to the certain. And yet, in that uncoordinated hodge-podge of comment, we encounter the same situation as in the early Christian record itself: a dearth if not complete lack of identifiable references to Jesus of Nazareth in the earliest part of the record, followed by a gradual accumulation of references which seem to have passed through a

transition in which earlier comments underwent an evolution of understanding and redaction, eventually to produce passages which are meant to refer to the Christian historical figure. In other words, we have in both bodies of literature a reverse development to that which we ought to expect. Instead of clear and prolific data in the earliest record, when memories were freshest and the effect Jesus had on those around him was most vivid, we find only silence in those memories, followed by a gradual development of information and biography as time passes and the literary record evolves. And, in the rabbinic as in the Christian record, we can see that the later picture of Jesus is a product of that process of redaction and evolution, not something that goes back to a genuine fond of more reliable knowledge.

Van Voorst (*op.cit.*, p. 107) throws this picture into high relief, complete with rationalization. The initial compilations, reflecting the earlier Tannaitic rabbis, "contain no explicit reference to Jesus and most probably no cryptic ones either." His explanation is: "The rabbis who compiled the Mishnah evidently regarded Jesus as unimportant to the laws of Judaism at that time, even as an illustration." So the period from which we could most hope to recover reliable remembered traditions about Jesus from observers who were closest to him is, for whatever reason, empty.

Then we enter the middle period of the Tosefta (roughly 220-350), which contains more commentary from the earlier rabbis, though with some evolution. This is where the first references emerge which scholars believe relate to Jesus, although such passages tend to be cryptic and throw no light on the historical man. Finally, with one of the Talmuds, clearer references do emerge, though their compatibility with the Gospel man and story is extremely problematic.

Tracing Jesus in the Jewish Commentaries

Frank Zindler, in the aforementioned *The Jesus the Jews Never Knew*, has done an excellent job in tracing and analyzing all this material. The earliest body of the literature, the Mishnah, nowhere contains the name "Jesus" (Yeshu), and the couple of passages which have sometimes been tentatively interpreted as references to him are so obscurely so that most scholarly opinion on the matter has rejected such an identification. These two passages, one about "a certain one" (sometimes translated a "so-and-so") who is a "bastard," the other about a group of people in Jewish biblical tradition, including one "Balaam," who "shall have no share in the world to come," have little if anything in them to justify the proposal that Jesus is meant. In the later Talmud, Jesus actually appears in the same scene as Balaam. Van Voorst (p. 115) notes that there is a long Jewish polemical tradition that identifies many people as "Balaam," and considers that the name's specific application to Jesus is "untenable."¹⁹⁷

When we get to the Tosefta (following the Mishna over the next century or so), we first encounter the name "Yeshu," but in association with the appellative "ben Pandera" (son of Pandera), sometimes rendered "Pant(h)era" or "Pantira." The full "Jesus the Nazarene" (*Yeshu ha-Notzri*) does not appear until we reach

the Babylonian Talmud. The "Yeshu ben Pandera" in the Tosefta, together with another name, "ben Stada" (though the latter never appears with "Yeshu"), are more confidently declared as 'code words' for Jesus.

But Zindler makes the argument that before the triumph of Christianity, no threat was posed to Jews and Judaism by the Christians, and so there would have been no reason for the rabbis to veil their comments about Jesus by using code words. Later, it is true that such terms were understood and used as code words but to read that practice into the earlier record is not justified. Moreover, when these alleged code words were carried over and used in the Talmuds, they sometimes appear within passages which have a much clearer intent as referring to Jesus; his full name, Jesus the Nazarene, is occasionally used. Thus, at a time when it was becoming more dangerous, such passages are *less* veiled, more explicit. Van Voorst suggests (p. 106) that it was "early hostility to Christianity" that produced "insulting pseudonyms" in the Tosefta, but there is no reason to regard the earlier hostility as any greater than the later one.

Zindler has demonstrated that the Jewish commentaries suffered insertions very much like the Christian documentary record, although not perhaps to the same blatant extent with the purpose of changing earlier thinking into later, or to attribute to a writer something he had not written. Insertions tended to be further elucidation added to earlier passages, perhaps based on new understanding. This type of redaction would have been quite capable of turning earlier references which had nothing to do with Jesus into ones which did.

Ben Pandera and Ben Stada

As noted, the names "ben Pandera" and "ben Stada" both appear in the Tosefta, but only the first is sometimes linked with the name "Yeshu." Zindler shows that there is no reason to equate the two names. Each appears in different anecdotes involving Rabbi Eliezer, for example, with "no indication that the two names denote one person" (p. 151). Thus, only one of them at most could be a code word for Jesus.

The two Ben Stada passages in the Tosefta are quite different. In the tractate *Shabbat* 11:15, the reference is so short and obscure (the context is writing on the Sabbath) we cannot know who he is. The second, in *Sanhedrin* 10:11, has a context which at first glance might suggest Jesus: it deals with deceivers who have led the people astray and how they are to be tried in a capital case using hidden witnesses; "Ben Stada" is brought in to serve as an example. But the elements in no way fit the Gospel scenario. Two disciples are enlisted to entrap Ben Stada into revealing his heresy and he is stoned; there is no mention of crucifixion or the Romans, let alone Pilate (Zindler notes that the Roman governor appears nowhere in the Jesus passages and probably not in any passage of all the Jewish writings). As Zindler puts it (p. 157), Ben Stada in the Tosefta

resembles neither the Jesus of Christianity nor any likely mock-Jesus that would have been created in Jewish folklore. Who he was—if he was a real person at all—we can only hypothesize.

One of those hypotheses, by R. Travers Hereford, was that he originally denoted "that Egyptian" mentioned in Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews*, 20.8.6, to whom there seems to be an allusion in Acts 21:38. Ben Stada was to undergo some revision when he entered the Babylonian Talmud, where an attempt was made to equate him with Ben Pandera. But confusion there is evident, and at one point the 'ben' is dropped and the 'Stada' is equated with a woman.

As for the two "Yeshu ben Pandera" passages in the Tosefta, this name is applied to a man to whom is attributed an unspecified heretical saying in one passage, and to a practice of curing in his name in the other. But he does not on this basis need to be equated with the Gospel Jesus, since we can hardly believe that no one else in rabbinic history could have fitted those attributions. In fact, Zindler notes (p. 145) quite logically that in both cases the passage has a disciple pronouncing or curing "in the name of Yeshu ben Pandera." In such a context, this would be a serious misstatement, since the speaker could hardly say that the healer cured in the name of a code word (or for that matter, in the name of a term which was a derogatory piece of polemic). This, taken with the fact that there was no need for 3rd century rabbis, let alone earlier ones, to avoid using Jesus' real name, suggests that neither of these passages in the Tosefta should be taken as references to Jesus. Furthermore, the Palestinian Talmud fails to contain one of these passages, and in its use of the other there is no "Yeshu ben Pandera" at all. This indicates that the name is probably not a product of the Tosefta, or else was added very late in its formation, and thus the Palestinian Talmud did not get a chance to reflect them as they now stand. Their appearance in the Tosefta thereby becomes suspicious; and in fact Zindler demonstrates that the pair of references, appearing together, is likely to be an interpolation (see below), placed in their present position through catchword association.

Stealing Jesus into the Talmud

Thus, before we reach the Talmuds we have no secure evidence that rabbinic commentaries show any knowledge of an historical Jesus. But in approaching the two Talmuds, we come up against another puzzling situation. The Palestinian (or Jerusalem) Talmud contains no reference to "*Yeshu ha-Notzri*" (Jesus the Nazarene). It carries over certain of those dubious passages about Ben Pandera and Ben Stada from the Tosefta, but without adding anything to them, without showing that the Palestinian compilers understood them as referring to the Christian Jesus; nor did they add new material of their own about such a figure. This is a compilation that continued at least until the end of the 4th century and was put together in the very district in which Jesus is reputed to have conducted his career and underwent his death and resurrection. And yet this entire record contains nothing which would indicate a knowledge of Jesus of Nazareth.

Thus, not a single one of the rabbinic passages allegedly about Jesus that are commonly quoted by scholars comes from the Palestinian Talmud. Instead, as Zindler puts it (*op.cit.*, p.231), they are the product (in the Babylonian Talmud) of "rabbis... five or even six centuries after the time at which Jesus of Nazareth is

supposed to have been born in Palestine...living hundreds of miles from there in Iraq (Babylon)." It is they who "appear to have completed the literary task of creating a life for him." Yet in that compilation and process of creation we seem to encounter a wide range of interpretation about this newly-imagined Jesus—or perhaps it is an imagining of two separate figures. In *Sanhedrin* 107b, Jesus the Nazarene is said to have been persecuted by the Maccabean king Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 BCE), which puts him 100 years ahead of his time. On the other hand, in *Shabbat* 104b and *Sanhedrin* 67a, Jesus is given a certain Pappos ben Jehudah as a father, who is identified elsewhere as a contemporary of Rabbi Akiba, living in the early 2nd century. His mother was "Miriam the hairdresser."

In these two latter passages, the person being referred to is not called Jesus, but simply Ben Stada, and an attempt is being made there to equate him with Ben Pandera. The attempt, with its placement of this double figure into the early 2nd century, has been inserted (in only some manuscripts) in two quite different contexts, both taken from earlier appearances in the Tosefta, namely the two Ben Stada passages looked at earlier. In other words, the former Ben Stada is being expanded in the Babylonian Talmud, being linked with Ben Pandera—but still with no explicit identification with Yeshu the Nazarene, despite what scholars read into him. We still lack any explicit link of Ben Stada with Jesus.

Let's look at a couple of those expansions and reworkings of earlier Tosefta passages in the Babylonian Talmud (also called the "Bavli"). We saw that one of the Tosefta's Ben Stada anecdotes concerned the process of trying a 'deceiver'; Ben Stada was presented as one who had been exposed as a heretic and stoned to death. "Thus they did to Ben Stada in Lydda...and they stoned him." When this is carried over into the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 67a), certain changes have taken place: "And thus they did to Ben Stada in Lydda, and they hung him on the eve of Passover." The story has become a hanging which occurs on Passover eve. The text suggests that stoning was also involved—perhaps both, with the hanging being of the dead body, a Mishnah requirement. And yet the focus has now shifted to hanging, with its placement in the text seeming to imply that this was the cause of death.

Is this evidence of an association with the Christian Jesus, with the hanging confused with crucifixion? Possibly. Scholars like to assume so, but when we see its development from an earlier form that had no mention of Passover or hanging, it can be seen that its original application had nothing resembling Jesus in mind. We cannot read a later evolution back into the earlier version. Van Voorst (p.16) admits that the original Ben Stada passages are not a code name for Jesus, but refer to "yet another one among many who were punished for falsehood." Subsequent developments were "in all likelihood tacked on later to apply polemic against Ben Stada to Jesus."

The statement about the hanging is immediately followed by an attempt to identify Ben Stada with Ben Pandera, an insertion which has also been made following the other passage about Ben Stada brought over from the Tosefta. (The insertion is a bit confused; apparently, the rabbis could not agree):

Ben Stada is Ben Pandira. Rabbi Hisda said, "The husband was Stada, the paramour was Pandira." [Then, according to the compiler:] The husband was Pappos ben Jehudah [as noted above, of the early 2nd century], the mother was Stada. The mother was Miriam the dresser of women's hair. As we say in Pumbeditha [the rabbinic center in Babylonia], "Such a one has been false to her husband." [*Shabbat* 104b]

The later Talmud is trying to make sense of who Ben Stada was and thinks to identify him with Ben Pandera (even that is not too clear, if we consider other translations) and places him in the 2nd century. It is even being suggested that "Stada" was the family name of the mother. (Perhaps taking a cue from the rabbis, some later Christian commentators actually specify that "Pandera" was Mary's family name.) But there is still no clear indication that Ben Stada has become the Christian Jesus, especially considering that his execution, whether by stoning or hanging, continues to take place in Lydda, 23 miles from Jerusalem. Zindler points out that another factor in scholars' interpretation is the reference to Ben Stada's mother, Miriam the hairdresser, whom they take to be Mary the mother of Jesus. But "Miriam" was probably the most popular female name in that time; there are more than enough Mary's to go around in the Gospels themselves. In fact, Miriam the hairdresser appears in another Bavli passage (*Hagigah* 4b). Here an angel directs Rabbi Bibi bar Abaji to bring her to him. Rabbi Bibi lived in the 4th century. So Miriam the hairdresser seems to have carried on her occupation for well over two centuries.

The above passage contains an allusion to adultery, and the tendency among scholars is to take this as further evidence that "Miriam" is being associated with Mary the mother of Jesus, making reference to the dubious circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth. But exactly who was the "paramour" of whom, and who was thereby illegitimate, is uncertain in this garbled piece of confusion. The thought is also influenced by the pun the rabbis have indulged in—puns being something they were especially fond of and based many of their conclusions on—between Mary's now presumed surname of "Stada" and the term "*satath da*," meaning 'to turn away' (from one's spouse, as a euphemism for adultery). It is far from clear whether the point is to turn Ben Pandira into a bastard; thus no allusion to Jesus, or his mother, can be securely derived from this.

Van Voorst (p. 117) thinks that Ben Pandera "is reasonably identified with Jesus." Yet he admits, on the other hand, that "this tradition of Ben Pantera is so slim and difficult here that, were it not for external corroboration, this passage's reference to Jesus probably would be given up for unauthentic." Especially so, one could add, since the writer of this passage has sought to identify him with Ben Stada, whom Van Voorst has already concluded was not a code name for Jesus. As for that "external corroboration," Van Voorst is referring to Celsus' designation of Jesus as the son of a soldier named Panthera (Origen, *Contra Celsum* I, 32). But Origen should not be allowed to override Van Voorst's quite sensible reservations on the Talmud, as shall be seen when the question of what Celsus actually witnesses to is examined later.

In another Bavli passage from Babylon, we may finally be witnessing an evolution into the Christian Jesus. We saw earlier that one of the "ben Pandera" passages in the Tosefta had Rabbi Eliezer charged with hearing a word of heresy spoken by one Jacob of Chephar Sichnin "in the name of Yeshu ben Pantiri." When that passage was taken over into the Babylonian Talmud (*Abodah Zarah* 16b-17a) "Yeshu ben Pantiri" becomes "Yeshu ha-Notzri" (though only in some manuscripts), and the heretical words themselves which this Yeshu spoke are quoted. Moreover the name of the disciple speaking Yeshu's words has been somewhat changed. Zindler remarks on all this (p.235):

We must ask by what evidence, in the year 500 CE, did the Babylonian rabbis change *Sichnin* into *Sechanjal*? What source of inspiration revealed to them that Yeshua ben Pantiri was actually Yeshu ha-Notzri? And what oracle helped them to restore the lost words of Jesus' disquisition on the religious use of a prostitute's pay? Is there any reason to take any of this seriously in any historical sense?

This story is not to be found in the Palestinian Talmud (Yerushalmi), and Zindler takes this as evidence that, in its earlier version with "ben Pandera," it was

a late addition to the Tosefta, and had not yet been inserted into the edition of the Tosefta available to the Palestinian rabbis before their completion of the Yerushalmi [395 CE]. Thus, even the story about Yeshua ben Pantiri appears to be late and of doubtful historical significance.

It is also possible that the change to "Jesus the Nazarene" was made in only one manuscript; it is lacking in others, though it is unclear whether this was due to late Catholic censorship.¹⁹⁸ All in all, a convoluted evolutionary process like this leading out onto one shaky limb is hardly going to represent the preservation of a tradition about Jesus of Nazareth which goes back unerringly to the time of the 2nd century (Eliezer being a rabbi of that period).

Answering Christian Tradition

In Christian scholarly study of this literature it is generally acknowledged that the supposed passages about Jesus are developments which took place in later centuries in response to an established Christianity and its claims, leaving us without any reliable independent Jewish tradition about Jesus going back into the 1st century. This is especially true when we cannot trace those later references back through an earlier chain, but find the chain broken at their earlier versions. (This is in parallel to the Christian documentary record, in which sayings in the Gospels attributed to Jesus go back through an earlier 'chain' to a point in which they appear with no attribution to Jesus, as for example in the epistle of James.)

The Ben Stada who earlier showed no connection to Christianity may have come to be identified with the Christian Jesus because he had undergone trial as a "deceiver." To bring him into line with the Jesus of Christian tradition he may have been made to be hanged instead of—or in addition to—being stoned, with the time specified as the eve of Passover. However, his name was not changed,

and the execution remained in Lydda; such a transformation was incomplete. In the passage about the Eliezer heresy hearing, the source of the heretical word was changed from Ben Pandira to Yeshu ha-Notzri (though not in every manuscript) probably for much the same reason. The Christian Jesus was seen as a heretic, speaking heretical teachings, so Ben Pandira came to be identified as him. But this sort of thing was simply a reaction under later circumstances, a reinterpretation of earlier writings about one or more people who were quite different. It was not a case of suddenly in the 4th or 5th century reconnecting with some preserved early tradition which was forgotten or overlooked in the interim, or which appeared earlier in some vaguer or misremembered form.

In this process of introducing Yeshu ha-Notzri (Jesus the Nazarene) into their understanding of earlier textual traditions, the Babylonian scribes set a trap for modern scholars of this literature, who have too often assumed that because those later scribes came to understand Yeshu ben Pandera and Ben Stada to be references to Jesus and turned him into such, those earlier names must have been code words for Jesus, allowing Jesus to be found in the Mishnah and Tosefta. But code words were not necessary in the earlier period, and it is not until the Talmudic period that we find the explicit naming of Jesus the Nazarene. Only further on, in the medieval period, do we find unmistakable code words for Jesus and imposed censorship.

A reaction not just to the Christian Jesus per se but to the Gospels may be evident in another passage of the Babylonian Talmud. This one seems to be a further development over the above-discussed passage in which Ben Stada is hanged on the eve of Passover (itself a development over an earlier stage in which he was merely stoned). We read in *Sanhedrin* 43a:

It was taught: On the eve of the Passover Yeshu [the Nazarene] was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, "He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Anyone who can say anything in his favor, let him come forward and plead on his behalf." But since nothing was brought forward in his favor, he was hanged on the eve of Passover, ["the Nazarene" appears in only one prominent manuscript.]

We may note that this incident is brought up only to illustrate an exception to the topic being discussed, one about the practice of heralds soliciting pleas for a condemned man, usually only immediately before his execution. It thus serves the Talmud's primary agenda of discussing the Law; it is not offered to elucidate history. And in fact, without the change of the Ben Stada of the Tosefta version into Yeshu [the Nazarene], the anecdote itself would tell us nothing about the dating of its occurrence.

Scholars suggest that the inclusion of the 40-day grace period for character witnesses to come forward is an apologetic counter to Christian accusations that Jesus had been summarily executed following an after-dark kangaroo court, only a day after his arrest. We also note that the location of Lydda has been dropped, and although Jerusalem is not specified in its place, it is possibly being assumed

on the basis of the Gospel event. As before, while the reference to stoning still remains in the background, the focus is on the hanging, as though this is the method of execution, not just a 'stringing up' after a death by stoning. But if the hanging is a euphemism for crucifixion, as some maintain, this would present a contradiction, since both forms of execution could obviously not take place. The anecdote remains out of sync with the Gospels in another crucial matter: there is no involvement of the Romans and the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. The best explanation for all this is that the original anecdote did not refer to Jesus at all, but only later attracted an identification with him through minor and incomplete amendments, leaving anomalies in the text.

This assumption of full responsibility for the death of Jesus, virtually playing up to the Christian stress on the Jews' historical role, seems inconceivable. Van Voorst calls it "extraordinary." Indeed, one might almost call it a death wish in view of the increasing danger by this time of Christian persecution. How could the rabbis have gotten it so wrong? Did they have an incomplete knowledge of the Gospels—perhaps virtually no first-hand knowledge at all, but only selected data vaguely absorbed through Christian hearsay against them?

When we look at what follows the above passage, we can see that their familiarity with the Gospel story would indeed have been abysmal if this was meant to reflect an historical Jesus who was anything like the Gospel portrayal:

Ulla retorted: "Do you suppose that he was one for whom a defence could be made? Was he not a *Mesith* [enticer] concerning whom scripture says *Neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him?* With Yeshu however it was different, for he was connected with the government [i.e., influential.] Our rabbis have taught, Jesus had five disciples—Matthai, Neqai, Netzer, Buni, and Thodah..." [There follows a scene as though in a court where each of these disciples is pronounced worthy of death, with subsequent execution apparently presumed.²⁰⁰]

This is hardly more distorted take-off on Christian tradition, and only one of these enumerated disciples resembles anyone in the New Testament. Rather, it further indicates that this material, or some form of it, originally related not to Christian traditions but to rabbinic traditions surrounding the Ben Stada who at an earlier stage was *not* identified with Jesus the Nazarene. Just as Ben Stada—now Jesus, at least in some manuscripts—retained something of the idea that he was stoned, these off-kilter details about disciples no doubt reflects something of the original Ben Stada. R. T. France notes (*op.cit.*, p.34) that the basic context is "entirely that of a Jewish punishment appropriate to a blasphemer," and that "the specific charge is a distinctively Jewish one, 'magic and leading Israel astray'." This would also mean that the assumption of responsibility for the execution was no reckless death wish. It was a carryover from when the episode had nothing to do with Jesus, but only the stoning of whoever Ben Stada was.

The failure of the Bavli to correct these inconsistencies shows that the rabbis brought no clear traditions about Jesus to the evolution of these passages. Van Voorst remarks (p.119): "We can safely deduce that the rabbis responsible for

this *baraita* [the 40-day herald passage above] must not have felt pressure from Christians about responsibility for the death of Jesus, else they would never have told it." But that 'pressure' is found from Justin on, and the more reasonable explanation is that they "told it" because the basic event contained in the passage was never meant to refer to Jesus when it was first formulated. Thus, we do not in fact have any remembrance of Jesus on the rabbis' part, no matter how far off the mark. What we have is remembrance of someone else, who has later come to be misconstrued with the founder figure of the Christian movement—and that by perhaps only a few people who were responsible for its reorientation in certain manuscript lines of the Babylonian Talmud.

Two other passages in that Talmud refer to Jesus the Nazarene. The first (in *Sanhedrin* 107b) has Jesus excommunicated, concluding with the line:

And a teacher has said, "Jesus the Nazarene practiced magic and led astray and deceived Israel."

The latter is a clear reference to the Christian Jesus, but it is appended to an anecdote about someone who was excommunicated for inspecting a woman too closely. In its present form, the anecdote specifies "Jesus the Nazarene" as the one excommunicated, by the rabbi he was traveling with. But it cannot in any way represent a real or older Jesus tradition, for we can identify earlier versions of certain of its component elements, and they have nothing to do with Jesus. One line placed in Jesus' mouth appears in a different tractate of the Bavli, this time in the mouth of Gehazi whom Elisha is urging to repent; another line in what precedes the above passage, saying that the excommunicating rabbi pushed Jesus away with both hands, is also based on the Elisha-Gehazi tradition in 2 Kings. Yet a third line, Jesus' comment about the woman's eyes (which is what got him excommunicated), appears in the earlier Jerusalem Talmud (*Hagigah* 2.2), but in an anecdote which again has nothing to do with Jesus; rather, it recounts a certain rabbi Judah ben Tabbari who berates one of his disciples, and it is the latter who is the one who makes the remark about the woman's eyes.

This is the passage in which Jesus is dated in the time of Alexander Jannaeus (early 1st century BCE), fleeing to Egypt from that king's persecution of the Pharisees. Since Rabbi Judah ben Tabbari is known to be a figure of that time, we no doubt have a case of the Jerusalem Talmud passage representing the original source of the matter, although this version of it had nothing to do with fleeing persecution and even the rabbi's name is different. Jesus may later have been understood to be the anonymous disciple of Tabbari, and when he was introduced into the Bavli anecdote the Christian founder suffered the effect of living a century before he was born.

We have here a situation in direct parallel to what was observed in regard to Q, where anecdotes appearing in later stages of the document were put together out of separate elements that are found in other sources which show no sign of the Q setting, as in the Dialogue between Jesus and John. Seeing that this scene was artificially constructed out of independent sayings which had no application to any such situation, it was reasonably concluded that no such episode ever took

place. Similarly, the excommunication of Jesus in the Bavli can be concluded as artificially constructed as well, based on no actual tradition known to the rabbis involving Jesus, excommunicated or otherwise.

What point it was designed to make is difficult to say, unless it was simply for the purpose of creating a story that Jesus was excommunicated, although the circumstances are rather banal. It might be that the construction of the anecdote out of earlier precedents originally served as some sort of commentary on the topic of excommunication, only later evolving into an anecdote about Jesus once it was realized that it could be understood as applying to him.

A similar situation is found in another obscure passage of the Babylonian Talmud. In *Sanhedrin* 103a, the meaning of a Psalm verse is being discussed, one option being "that thou mayest not have a son or disciple who burns his food in public like Yeshu the Nazarene." The same phrase is included in another passage to offer a meaning for a different Psalm verse. But it happens that we have a quotation of the second passage in a lexicon of rabbinic texts compiled in the early 12th century, known as the *Arukh*; there our concluding line does not mention Jesus at all, but rather Manasseh (king of Judah 698-642 BCE). Zindler points out reasons to regard the *Arukh* version as reflecting the original. First, Manasseh, being the wayward son of King Hezekiah, fits much better than Jesus the role of the "type of son or disciple one would like to avoid having." (The bible does not elucidate under what circumstances Manasseh may have burned his food in public, unless this be a corruption of the burning of his own son as a sacrifice to Baal in the days when Yahweh still had to compete with other gods for Israelite favor.) Second, the *Arukh* predates by more than two centuries the oldest extant manuscript of the Babylonian Talmud (the "Munich" manuscript of 1342) which contains the reading of *Yeshu ha-Notzri*. Zindler argues that the author of the *Arukh*, writing in Rome in 1101, would likely have had access to older manuscripts than the Munich scribe. And a corruption from Manasseh to Jesus makes much better sense than one in the other direction.

Indeed, one of the difficulties in evaluating the rabbinic literature is the fact that we have no early manuscripts. The oldest of the Mishnah dates from 1400, the Tosefta from about 1150, the Palestinian Talmud from 1299, the Babylonian from 1342, with portions from the late 12th century. Again, this situation has parallels in the Christian documentary situation. Uncertain or disputed readings in the canonical literature may have light thrown upon them by secondary sources or early variant manuscripts which do not always favor an established reading valued by subsequent orthodoxy. (A good example is the missing verses in early manuscripts after Mark 16:8, which are now accepted as having been a later addition cobbled from material in other Gospels to fill in a perplexing void.) From the limited picture we do have in the surviving rabbinic literature, we can surmise that if we had an older extant body of material it could well bring that picture into sharper focus and reveal that the Jewish 'witness' to Jesus was a late development which can lay no claim to being derived from any earlier knowledge of an historical founder of the Christian faith.

Filling the Void

Why is there such wild deviation from the standard Christian story? As we have seen, virtually all the later Talmudic references which seem to have Jesus in view are built on earlier versions which do not. They are simply an overlay on foundations which had nothing to do with Christianity, and those foundations have skewed the picture of Jesus thus created. The Talmudic scribes never did construct new foundations in proper keeping with Christian tradition. This in itself would speak to the absence in Jewish tradition of any preserved historical knowledge of Jesus and his circumstances which could be pressed into service when those scribes came to be influenced by Christian claims. They simply tinkered with what had been written earlier on other subjects; this involved reinterpreting that material in the earlier commentaries as having had something to do with the Christian Jesus. The fact that they could do this indicates that they had no established knowledge of their own which would have helped them to realize that such a reinterpretation was badly out of whack. This half-hearted and ineffectual tinkering was hardly a concerted effort to correct a Christian picture which they should have regarded, if they had possessed a set of traditions of their own about Jesus, as erroneous and misleading.

Moreover, all this rabbinic response comes from the Talmud compiled in Babylonia. Given a Christian Church which very soon centered on Rome, and given a Christianity whose orthodoxy based on the Gospels had a western center of gravity, developing Gospel traditions may have penetrated only weakly into southern Mesopotamia. Tosefta anecdotes about Ben Pandera and Ben Stada are not carried over into the Palestinian Talmud in the same misleading way. They are not turned into references to Jesus the Nazarene, perhaps because in that geographical location, being closer to and more familiar with the Christian picture, it was realized that those passages in the earlier literature did *not* refer to the Christian Jesus. The Babylonian Talmud did not, of course, stay isolated in the Persian east; it eventually spread into the whole of the Jewish Diaspora and had much greater influence on later Judaism than earlier compilations. Thus the overall Jewish 'record' of response to Jesus was contaminated by this peculiar off-kilter commentary on established Christian tradition.²⁰¹

The absence of any preserved foundations about a Jesus of history constitutes evidence that can be adduced in favor of the non-existence of any such figure. By the time Christians in the 2nd century were making claims about what had happened to their historical founder, Jews (and not just the rabbis) had nothing concrete with which to counter them. They could appeal neither to preserved Jewish memories which the Christians had distorted, nor to a distortion of their own which, following Jesus' death, they might have been expected to subject the facts. All they had was a void, and they would hardly have settled for appealing to this as a sufficient counter. They would simply have begun reacting directly to those later Christian claims, disputing the 'facts' by denial, scoffing or lampooning, and by challenging the Christian reading of the scriptures. At least, that is the recourse we would expect to see.

Trypho and Celsus

And yet, with one exception from quite later times, we find nothing of that sort in any surviving non-rabbinical Jewish writings. Ironically, the only 'record' we have of such a thing from the 2nd and 3rd centuries is found in Christian apologists, in which they deal with alleged Jewish counters to Christian faith.

The first of these is Justin, in his *Dialogue with the Jew Trypho*. We must remember that Trypho's spoken dialogue is Justin's creation. He will voice the things that Justin is concerned with countering, and this relates entirely to the Christian reading of scripture and their claim that scripture supports the Gospel Jesus as being God's Son and Christ. This would indicate that the Jews at that time were saying nothing by way of challenge *except* in regard to such scriptural interpretation as applied to the Gospel figure. When Trypho talks of "this crucified man" (ch. 38) "who you say was crucified and ascended into heaven is the Christ of God" (ch. 39), he refers to the man described in and known from the Gospels; he says nothing about him other than what is contained in the picture created by the Christians themselves. Justin has given Trypho nothing else to draw on, no Jewish memories independent of the Gospels, no Jewish counter-traditions about the historical Jesus that might have been regularly thrown in the Christian face which Justin felt needed answering. When Justin declares that all those scriptural passages were fulfilled in Jesus, he seems unaware of a single reputed Jewish tradition or claim about the actual historical man which he could have put in Trypho's mouth in order to refute it, something which the Jews were arguing did *not* conform to the scriptures, or contradicted them. Instead, Trypho, in arguing against Justin's interpretations, does so *on the basis of scripture and the suitability of its application to the Gospel Jesus being presented by Justin*. For that matter, neither is Justin in any different position. Everything Justin says about his Jesus is derived from scripture and the Gospels. He offers no sayings or deeds of Jesus, no tradition about him which might have been circulating among Christians but was not contained in the Gospels.

Now, it is true that Justin makes one statement which is often claimed to refer to an anti-Christian activity by the Jews based on some historical knowledge of Jesus. In chapter 108, Justin makes this accusation of the Jews, after they learned that Jesus had risen from the dead:

...you have sent chosen and ordained men throughout all the world to proclaim that a godless and lawless heresy had sprung from one Jesus, a Galilean deceiver, whom we crucified, but his disciples stole him by night from the tomb, where he was laid when unfastened from the cross, and now deceive men by asserting that he has risen from the dead and ascended to heaven.

Is this evidence that in the 2nd century, and perhaps even earlier, Jews were actually going about claiming that the resurrection of Jesus was a sham, and that the disciples had stolen his body? First, we have to note that the reference to this is not placed in Trypho's mouth. Justin makes this bald statement and then never

addresses it, much less argues against such an accusation. Perhaps the Jews *were* going about labeling the new Christian movement a godless heresy—indeed, we would expect it. But that the disciples had stolen Jesus' body? That is too suspiciously like the guards sequence in Matthew's Gospel (eh. 27-28). In fact, has Justin simply made his own assumption based on the final line in the Matthean episode: "This story became widely known, and is current in Jewish circles to this day"? Matthew created the image of Jews going about spreading a counter to the resurrection in the form of the accusation that the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus, and Justin has read it in the Gospel of Matthew (though it was not yet known by that name) and accepted it as historical fact, referring to it in this passage of the Dialogue. We have no reason to think otherwise.²⁰²

The second Christian commentator to give voice to an alleged Jewish response to Christian doctrine is Origen. In his *Contra Celsum*, he reports Celsus as putting certain words into a Jew's mouth critical of Jesus' birth. This makes the alleged report third-hand. Does Celsus' anonymous Jew reflect actual Jewish polemic, and if so, how widespread was it? Alternatively, has Celsus created this symbolic Jew as a medium to put across his own ideas, his own reaction to the Gospels, in keeping with his practice of engaging in a lot of lampooning about their Jesus character? Scholars tend to read into Origen's passage the likelihood that Celsus' Jew represents general Jewish slander.

But this is far from necessarily the case. Celsus apparently specified only "a Jew," not Jews in general. Moreover, Origen himself is suspicious. When he first calls attention to Celsus' "Jew" (Bk. I, 28), he likens it to an "imitation of a rhetorician training a pupil," that is, the use of the device of a fictional character to make the speaker's point. He even suggests that in the contrived conversation between this Jew and Jesus, Celsus "does not maintain, throughout the discussion, the consistency due to the character of a Jew." Indeed, the very form in which Celsus has cast his 'Jewish' insults further suggests an artificiality to the whole thing, with little reflection of ordinary Jewish parlance. Moreover, and quite significantly, Origen himself never refers to this Jew's criticism in Celsus as something that actually existed within Jewish circles of either his own time or of Celsus' time; his counter is directed solely toward Celsus' own presentation.

That presentation (ch. 28 and 32) is the nasty rejoinder—clearly, to the virgin birth doctrine—that Jesus had been born in a poor village, of a mother who conceived him in adultery with a soldier named Panthera, and that Jesus had come up with the virgin birth idea himself to counter the scandal. The latter point, together with the accompanying accusation that Jesus had gone to Egypt to learn the magic tricks of the Egyptians, has Celsus' own style to it, in that he portrays Jesus, as he often does, as one who cleverly engineered his own self-promotion.

Thus it is not at all secure that Origen has here provided reliable indication of an anti-Christian polemic on the part of Jews that Jesus was the son of a soldier named Panthera. Meier's statement, "Celsus' account is important because it is the first *clear* and *clearly datable* report of such accusations among the Jews"

{*op.cit.*, p.223), is overly optimistic; and he seriously qualifies it later (see note 204). But let us assume the possibility of Meier's contention, which would not in itself be inherently implausible. Some have noted that the name "Panthera" may have been the result of a deliberate caricature of the Greek word "*parthenos*" for virgin, a pun aided by its similarity to the common name; and because that name was common among the soldiery, Jesus' father became, in the parody, a soldier. Possible evidence that this may have grown into a 'running satire' is the fact that Christians of the 5th century seem to have tried to spin it into something positive. Epiphanius and later John of Damascus declared (seemingly in all seriousness) that the name "Pandera" was Joseph's family name, or else the name of Mary's paternal grandfather.

But the question becomes, must we take Celsus' statement, with its "son of Panthera" feature (reliable or otherwise), as some evidence that those references to Yeshu ben Pandera in the Tosefta were indeed meant to refer to the Christian Jesus? Yet we must not lose sight of the fact that such passages were shown, through textual criticism, as almost certainly not having a Jesus in mind at all, something most scholars tend to agree with (see note 201). It thus becomes something of a contradictory exercise to go against that textual criticism and maintain that Origen provides evidence of Ben Pandera being a code word for Jesus in the Tosefta period of the rabbinic literature. Nor can we reverse direction and suggest that a 'Jesus' reading in those passages of the Tosefta supports the indication in Celsus that the Jews were indeed indulging in that kind of satirical polemic on the subject of Jesus' birth. In either direction it becomes a circular exercise.

That aside, however, trying to read Celsus' Jew into the Tosefta passages may be a moot enterprise. First, it will be recalled that there was reason to think that those Tosefta appearances of the name "Yeshu ben Pandera" were very late, since they did not find their way into the Palestinian Talmud. Second, the oldest Tosefta manuscript comes from the 12th century. The text before that time could have been influenced by the later Talmud, perhaps leading to the addition of the name "Yeshu" to "ben Pandera." Third, as noted earlier, Zindler makes a good case for suspecting that the two "Yeshu ben Pandera" passages in the Tosefta are interpolations.²⁰³ Thus, the whole issue is completely uncertain.

Moreover, Meier has made the point (*op.cit.*, p.223-4) that Celsus' Jew would have lived in Celsus' neighborhood, namely the Diaspora and not Palestine. He has noted the absence of any sign of such a polemic existing among Jews in the latter area, and moreover it is not found even in the Diaspora before Celsus (the accusation is missing on Trypho's part in Justin a decade earlier). One might accept that it would not have arisen until the Gospels were in circulation—something we do not see until almost the time of Justin—and that Jews would only then have encountered the claim of virgin birth for Jesus; this would make it, as Meier acknowledges, simply a parody based on the Gospels having no earlier foundation. But why would such a Jewish polemic have been confined to the Diaspora? Why is there no evidence of it arising in Palestine as well? It is

certainly a rejoinder that should readily have appealed to Jews and spread. And why *did* it fail to be picked up by the rabbis and find its way into the early Mishnah and Tosefta collections? A suggested answer to all these questions is that whatever Celsus put into the mouth of his "Jew," it did not represent an actual widespread accusation on the part of Jews in general.²⁰⁴

Thus, the very limited (and suspect) indication provided by Origen should not be allowed to override the telling silence and revealing treatment of those dubious figures in later rabbinic literature.

A One-Sided Contest

One of the peculiarities of the Jewish rabbinical writings in their dealings with Christianity is the spotty and uncoordinated nature of that reaction. They contain no organized response, indeed nothing more than individual units of a paragraph or two, each in isolation. What is surprising in the post-Jesus era is that no Jew, whether rabbi or otherwise, seems to have undertaken a deliberate, coherent and comprehensive response to Christianity and the Jesus juggernaut that was threatening to overrun the empire, one having an especially virulent hostility toward the Jews themselves. The entire Christian phenomenon from the 2nd century on was postulated on the claim that the Jews had rejected the very Messiah they had been waiting for, had misinterpreted their own scriptures and were blind to the promise of Jesus contained in them. Moreover, they had been complicit in his killing, and as a consequence had been abandoned by their God who turned to bestow his favor on the new believers in his Son. Surely this would have prompted some kind of significant counter.

It is true that from 70 CE onward, the Jews as a whole had other distractions to cope with, the destruction of their religious center, the loss of their country, the necessity for reorientation in a scattered, largely hostile world. But with the Christians accusing them of having brought it all upon themselves, it is indeed surprising—even perplexing—that they failed for centuries to create any literary work (at least any that we know of) which addressed all those accusations and all that unfair, misrepresented history.

If the orthodox picture of Christianity's genesis and development were essentially true, it should not have been long before the Jews came to realize that something mischievous was afoot and did not bode well for their own future. At a time when memories were still fresh, we might expect that some individual, some community, would feel the desire or necessity to produce some sort of written counter to what the Christians were saying, especially if one or more Gospels were being flaunted in Jewish faces during the period when traditional scholarship says they were written, all of them by the end of the 1st century. Yet even in oral form, Jewish retorts to Christian claims and attempts to discredit the person of Jesus of Nazareth do not appear, as we have seen, until the time of Justin in the 150s, embodied in his symbolic character Trypho; and even there the polemical material is entirely confined to a Jewish response to the Christians' interpretation of the scriptures. It is further decades later that we see possible

(though shaky) evidence of Jewish rejoinders about Jesus himself in the work of Celsus, as preserved in Origen.

If the Jews were amazingly slow off the mark, it was because they had in effect been sucker punched. They failed to see it coming because they had no awareness, no memories about the newly-reputed Christian originating event. Their reaction was piecemeal, disorganized, because what they found themselves reacting to had no basis in anything they could put their finger on in their own historical background. If the events of the New Testament Gospels and Acts bore any resemblance to reality, it is inconceivable that the experiences of the Jews who lived through and endured them would have failed to root themselves in their traditions. If there had been a Jesus who had challenged the very basis of rabbinic authority, who had sought to overturn key elements of the Law (strict Sabbath keeping, dietary restrictions on unclean foods), who claimed the right to forgive sins, etc., a rabbinic opposition could hardly fail to have formed, devoted to countering and discrediting him. If this troublemaker had been executed, especially with the connivance of the Jewish religious authorities, their reactions and pronouncements on the event would have entered the rabbinic oral tradition of the time.

If that *Mesith* had immediately given rise to a significant new movement, one proclaiming his resurrection from the dead, and with the later-evidenced rabbinic ability to preserve and employ such traditions (the Pharisees being an oral transmission culture), there should have been a solid preserved body of early rabbinic record about Jesus and the Jewish response to him. The Talmuds certainly preserve early traditions about people and events of far less significance than the Jesus of the Gospels; some are so obscure that we have to wonder at the rabbis' fixations on maintaining such arcane memories.

It would be like America of the later 20th century showing no awareness of the Second World War or the role it played in the ongoing relations between democracy and communism. Could we imagine the West in the post-war period publishing not a single book on the relations between East and West coming out of the War, especially if communist authors were producing books and propaganda which offered accounts of the War and its aftermath in ways which western authors would not have agreed with?

Such a situation would be analogous to the type of void we find in the Jewish record of the first several centuries, a void filled only by spotty, uncoordinated bits and pieces of comment by recorders of rabbinic tradition, comments which show the most abysmal understanding and ineffectual response to what had allegedly happened in their own history. These were probably supplemented over the years with no more than impromptu rejoinders by the Jew-in-the-street to what the Christians were now saying. The Christians were playing the game with a highly organized playbook, and the Jews had not even fielded a team—probably because they were unable to remember that they had been notified about the game or what the rules were. Their own past was totally silent and dark on the subject.

The *Toledoth Yeshu*

Eventually, that unofficial Jewish response coalesced into something which gained a fair degree of notoriety—if not much effectiveness, since it was too late for that—a work known as the *Toledoth Yeshu*, or *The Generations of Jesus* ("generations" referring to the idea of family tree). This was a satirical piece of polemic, a kind of anti-Gospel, which parodied various elements of Christian tradition. The earliest it can be seen as a fully-developed book is the 9th century, although by then it may have had such a form for a few centuries. It also existed (and still does) in several variants; there was no single definitive *Toledoth*.

The task of tracing its roots in earlier times and what forms those roots took has proven to be a largely fruitless undertaking. There is probably no doubt that component parts and individual elements had circulated orally for some time, perhaps with certain pieces in written form. But scholars have abandoned any attempt to see such root components as being based on historical knowledge among Jews that could go back to the 1st century, rather than being reliant on later Christian claims and Christian storytelling. Something in circulation that could be identified as an 'ur-collection' of *Toledoth* themes cannot be uncovered in the earlier centuries, a suggestion or two in Origen's *Celsus* notwithstanding. If anything, the *Toledoth* grew out of the later Talmud's references to Jesus, and we have seen how confused and rootless *they* were. (The *Toledoth* dating of Jesus, in fact, follows a Talmudic error). As well, it draws on the Gospels and Acts extensively.

In the Talmudic vein, the *Toledoth* has Jesus dying in the reign of the widow of king Alexander Jannaeus, Queen Helena (actually Alexandra or Salome, the latter possibly corrupted into Helena). This would date the Christian founder's death somewhere around 70 BCE. The most interesting part of the *Toledoth* tale relates to Jesus' death and what happened to his body afterwards (although these details vary somewhat between versions):

And in that very hour, he was executed. It was the sixth hour and the eve of the Passover as well as of the Sabbath. When they brought him out to hang him on a tree, the tree broke, for the (name of God) was with him. When fools saw that one tree after another snapped beneath him, they ascribed it to his great righteousness—until, that is, they fetched for him the trunk of a carob tree...When they had left him hanging until the hour of afternoon prayer, they took him down from the tree, for it is written, 'His body must not remain over night on the tree.' Then they buried him....

Then the radicals came before Helena, the queen, and said, 'They have killed the messiah, who displayed many wonders in his lifetime. And now, after killing him, they buried him. But he is not in his grave! Already he has ascended into heaven...'

At once they mounted a search for him in the grave but they did not find him. She asked them, 'If you buried him in this grave, where is he now?' At this, the sages were perplexed and had no answer for her. In fact, a certain

man had removed him from his grave and brought him into his garden, and he had divided the stream flowing into his garden and buried him in a pit he dug in the sand. Then he had restored the waters to their proper channel over the new grave....

Then one went forth, an elder named Rabbi Tanchuma, and he was walking in a field, weeping. The caretaker of the garden saw him and asked him, 'Why do you weep?'...When [the gardener] heard this report, that all Israel was mourning and that the wicked were claiming 'he has ascended into heaven' [this instead of a resurrection], then the caretaker said, 'This is a day for Israel to rejoice and be glad, then; for as it happens, I stole him away because of the insurgents, to prevent their absconding with the body, for then we should never hear the end of it....'

And all Israel followed the caretaker of the garden. Then they tied the corpse by the ankles to a horse's tail and dragged him through the streets of Jerusalem until they brought him to the queen. And they said, 'Behold that fellow who ascended to heaven!' And they departed from her courts rejoicing while she mocked the radicals and praised the sages.¹⁸⁵

This scene is often compared to Matthew's 'guard at the tomb' scene (27:62-66, 28:12-15). But there are significant anomalies. It cannot serve to support Matthew's alleged contention (28:15) that Jews were going about during his own time claiming that the disciples had stolen the body as a way to discredit the resurrection. The Matthean scenario requires that the body had disappeared *permanently*, and that the alleged Jewish counter to this entailed the admission that it had never been recovered. But in the *Toledoth*, the gardener's removal of the body is only temporary, with no thought of theft involved, although he had acted to forestall that particular possibility by others. Thus, the *Toledoth* scenario cannot have been an outgrowth of the Jewish accusation alleged by Matthew, since they contradict each other. Nor would it make sense as a deliberate change, since that would have involved abandoning a good explanation in favor of something which could serve a far less useful purpose. The Christian story maintained that the body had never been produced, and the Jews possessed no evidence or tradition that it was otherwise. The *Toledoth* scene, then, would not serve as an explanation for a *missing* body; it seems simply to have filled the role of parody. While it could also constitute a denial that any resurrection had taken place, this does not relate to, or provide support for, Matthew's contention that there existed a Jewish accusation that the disciples had stolen the body in order to explain the fact that it had permanently disappeared.²⁰⁶

Van Voorst and others consider that the *Toledoth* took much of its cue from the Talmudic references to Jesus and expanded on them. One of those Talmudic motifs is alleged to have been the birth of Jesus from his mother's adulterous relationship with "ben Pandera"; but, as we have seen, it is far from certain that the Talmud intended any such assertion. Thus Van Voorst is on dubious ground in trying to use this assumed assertion to support the interpretation in Origen that Celsus was witnessing to a general Jewish slander of that nature.

Similarly dubious is the claim that support for it can be found in the presentation of Jesus' birth in the *Toledoth*, for this, as in the scene of the missing body, is notably different (and no soldier is involved). Here, Jesus is the product of a deception, not an adulterous affair. In the opening chapter, Mary, at the time only betrothed to one Johanan, is deceived by her neighbor Joseph son of Pandera, who lusted after her, into thinking that she is having pre-marital intercourse with her husband-to-be. (The reader is not enlightened as to how this deception was accomplished.) It is difficult to see this change as growing out of an earlier slander of deliberate adultery, since it would entail the softening of such an accusation, showing a greater degree of respect to Mary—and even to Jesus. This milder *Toledoth* version should in itself be an indication that the Jews who formulated it were aware of no stronger adultery accusation in either the Talmud or among the Jews of Celsus' time.

The rest of the *Toledoth* story portrays Jesus as a false prophet and magician, motifs whose starting points can probably be identified in the Babylonian Talmud—but based in earlier versions which had nothing to do with Jesus. Frank Zindler, as he has done with the rabbinic literature, traces a complex history of manuscript traditions and *Toledoth* themes and components, and comes to the conclusion that rather than a single document by a single author passed down through the centuries, the *Toledoth Yeshu* was "a living tradition, flourishing in the age of printing and tracing back to an antiquity of uncertain depth." As for an 'Ur-text' of the *Toledoth*, Zindler finds, tracing through Church Fathers from Justin on, that evidence for early knowledge of a specific *Toledoth* document is weak. Celsus is almost certainly not familiar with any such document. The earliest date that could feasibly be given to any organized satire—whose specific content we cannot be sure of—is the 4th century. And Zindler would more than agree with Van Voorst that "scholarly consensus is correct to discount [the *Toledoth*] as a reliable source for the historical Jesus."

In summing up his survey of Jewish sources on Jesus, Van Voorst (p. 129-34) attempts to address the silence in the Jewish record, particularly in the early period. He asks, "Why are the references we have to Jesus in Jewish literature not more *contemporary* to him?" His explanations are far from convincing. Since he has no evidence of any attention paid to Jesus in the 1st century among the rabbis, he interprets this as an attempt by them "to squelch contact with Christianity and discussion about Christ—in other words, to fight what appeal Christianity might still have to Jews with silence." Apparently the rabbis adopted a policy of 'ignore them and they'll go away.' In the 2nd century, since Christians were identified as 'heretics,' this too meant that they had to be ignored. Then in the 3rd century, the rabbis were now preoccupied with religious law, not history, and so there was a further ignoring of Jesus. Yet somehow, after three centuries of ignoring Christianity and its founder, the later rabbis still managed to supply "more information than from classical sources to corroborate the main lines of the traditions about Jesus found in the New Testament." Considering that the classical sources (and these unreliable) have supplied only the barest minimum

of information about Jesus, one supposes that the scraps from the later rabbis—which built upon earlier material that had nothing to do with him—amount to a feast of plenty, even though they have completely garbled anything that might resemble, let alone "corroborate," the "main lines" of New Testament tradition.

Finally, Van Voorst indulges in an old chestnut directed "to those few who still argue that Jesus never existed." He claims that "the references to Jesus in Jewish tradition provide an even stronger case than those in classical literature that he did indeed exist, and did the main things that the church said about him." The principal pillar in this picture is, of course, Josephus, whom we are about to examine; but the rabbis are included for corroboration. Even though Van Voorst has himself demonstrated that nothing from the early period was preserved by them, and that Christianity was virtually ignored in rabbinic tradition for two to three centuries, still, the rabbis are witness to an historical Jesus because they failed to appeal to "the most effective polemic against Christianity," namely, that he never existed. Thus the Talmud becomes a witness to an historical Jesus: "All Jewish sources treated Jesus as a fully historical person." Considering that those sources, outside of Josephus, come from at least the 3rd century and beyond, and that most of them place their Jesus of history as much as a century before or after the usual time and cannot even remember that he had been crucified by the Romans, such a testimony from the witness box would be thrown out of court.

It is too often on reasoning such as this that traditional scholarship maintains that the historicity of Jesus has been confirmed and mythicism discredited.

Postscript: Qumran

A brief word can be devoted to the Dead Sea Scrolls. In the immediate period after their discovery in 1945, there was considerable stir about the possibility of connections to be gleaned between the scrolls and Jesus and the early Christian community. But while the scrolls have provided a certain degree of background into which some aspects of Christian beginnings could be seen to fit or be related to, particularly in regard to apocalyptic expectation and early gnostic ideas, there was no Jesus to be found at Qumran. As John P. Meier puts it (*op.cit.*, p.94):

There is no indication that Jesus was ever directly connected with the Qumran community. He is never mentioned in the documents found at or near Qumran, and his freewheeling attitude toward the stricter interpretation of the Mosaic Law is the very antithesis of the superobservant Qumranites, who considered even the Pharisees too lax. All this has not kept some imaginative scholars from seeing Jesus and John the Baptist in certain Qumran texts....The same can be said of attempts to find fragments of NT documents among the smaller scraps from Qumran.

Those imaginative scholars notwithstanding, the Dead Sea Scrolls can in no way support the existence of an historical Jesus.²⁰⁷ New theories since Meier about the nature of the scrolls and their provenance, together with the nature of the Qumran site itself and the questioning of an Essene presence there, are interesting, but bring us no closer to an historical Christian founder.

Flavius Josephus

I: The *Testimonium Flavianum*

In any survey of the non-Christian witness to Jesus, the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus occupies center stage. Analyzing the two passages containing a reference to Jesus in the surviving manuscripts of Josephus has become a major industry in the debate over his existence.

A young Joseph ben Matthias (he was born in 37 CE) fought in the Jewish War of 66-70 as commander in Galilee, but he was forced to surrender to the Roman general Vespasian. Recognizing that Rome's rule was irresistible, he threw in his lot with the enemy. He predicted correctly that Vespasian would become emperor and pronounced him to be the fulfillment of ancient Jewish prophecies about a coming ruler and savior. The balance of his life was spent in Rome as a client of the Flavian (Vespasian's) family. Under the name Flavius Josephus he wrote his two great histories, the *Jewish War* and the *Antiquities of the Jews*. Although he was mistrusted and even regarded as a turncoat by his fellow Jews, he attempted in his writings to serve as an apologist for the Jewish people to a Roman and Greek audience. He died some time after 100 CE.

Josephus' first work was an account of the War, that paramount catastrophe of Jewish history in which Judea was laid waste, much of Jerusalem was leveled, and the Temple and its sacrificial cult were destroyed, never to be revived. The *Jewish War* was initially written in Aramaic for use in the east, designed to discourage further revolt against Rome. That first version has been lost. It was followed not long afterward by an account in Greek of the same events, this time for a Greco-Roman readership. Josephus spent much of the remainder of his life writing his nation's history, a paraphrase of the Hebrew bible's historical books with additions from other sources. The *Antiquities of the Jews* was published in the year 93-94.

For modern historians, the works of Josephus have been the single most valuable source of information on 1st century Palestine, yet it is quite probable that they owe their survival through the Middle Ages to the Christian copyist or copyists who inserted those two passages about Jesus in the *Antiquities* (Books 18 and 20) some time between the 2nd and 4th centuries. That 'witness'—the first and longer passage is known as the "*Testimonium Flavianum*" (the Flavian Testimony [to Jesus])—was treasured by Christians as being fully authentic for over a millennium, with the result that Josephus enjoyed a privileged position in the priorities of medieval preservers of ancient non-Christian manuscripts.

But are those two passages in fact forgeries? Despite the efforts of modern commentators to protect them from dissolution under the light of examination a good case can be made for saying that Josephus wrote nothing about Jesus and was probably unaware of any such figure. As in all matters of historical research it may be difficult to "prove" that Josephus made no reference to Jesus. But if the claim that he did so can be sufficiently undermined, or if one can demonstrate that both passages are unreliable and unlikely to be his product, then at the very least they are removed from contention and cannot be used to discredit the argument, based on evidence within the Christian record itself, that there was no historical Jesus.

"Testimonium Flavianum"

In Book 18, Chapter 3, Paragraph 3 of the *Antiquities of the Jews* (XVIII, 3, 3, or 18.63 in the newer numbering system), one small paragraph follows an account of a couple of misfortunes visited upon the Judean Jews by the governor Pontius Pilate; it is followed by reports of certain scandals of the time in Rome, one of them involving Jews. In its present form, the paragraph reads:

Now about this time there lived Jesus a wise man, **if one ought to call him a man**, for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. **He was the Messiah**. When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing [lit., the principal men] among us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who in the first place had come to love him did not forsake him. **For he appeared to them alive again on the third day, as the holy prophets had predicted these and many other wonderful things about him**. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, continues to the present day.

It has been obvious to modern commentators for some time that Josephus could not have written the passages in bold type, since this would mean he subscribed to Christian doctrine. The line about the teacher of truth is suspect as well. But what about the remainder? Could Josephus have written this 'distilled' *Testimonium*?

It is important to realize the nature of the argument for such an 'authentic original.' Essentially, it consists of eliminating those portions of the paragraph which could clearly or in all likelihood *not* be the product of Josephus, then declaring the rest to be a feasible original. The evidence to support this feasible original is, however, almost entirely lacking, or at best indicated by weak or ambiguous arguments. During the first half of the 20th century, the predominant scholarly opinion was that the two passages in Josephus were probably entirely spurious.²⁰⁸ In recent decades, however, the almost universal scholarly tendency is to attempt the extraction of a residual passage which could be authentic to Josephus. This has proven to be something of a 'bandwagon' process in which certain basic arguments are regularly recycled, with little or no progress achieved in making them more effective, let alone rendering them conclusive.

The Argument to Language

One of those arguments is the claim that such an "original passage" contains phrases and vocabulary characteristic of Josephus. But if a Christian copyist were seeking to create a convincing interpolation, he would likely try to employ Josephan fingerprints to make it appear authentic; and if he were introducing terms or ideas similar to those expressed elsewhere in Josephus he would have precedents to draw on. If he were someone who worked with the manuscripts of Josephus on a regular basis, such imitation might well become second nature to him. Guignebert (see note 208) opined (*op.cit.*, p. 17): "It may be admitted that the style of Josephus has been cleverly imitated, a not very difficult matter..."

The language found in the *Testimonium*, whether allegedly Josephan or decidedly Christian, will be examined in detail later in this chapter. One example will illustrate our point here. The phrase "wise man" is used to describe Jesus. But "wise" is consistently applied by Josephus to figures—mostly Jewish, such as Solomon and Daniel (e.g., *Ant.* VIII, 2, 7 / 8.53; X, 11, 2 / 10.237)—whom he praises and holds in high regard, and it is questionable that Josephus could have so regarded Jesus. A good case can be made, in a comparative identification of many *Testimonium* terms with Eusebius, the 4th century Christian historian who is the first writer to quote the *Testimonium*, that there is a strong possibility that Eusebius was the forger of the passage in its entirety. For now, we can say that the unusual application of certain terms in the *Testimonium*, when considering their usual use elsewhere by Josephus, is an argument *against* their authenticity. It speaks to an interpolator drawing on Josephan vocabulary, but failing to take into account that the use he makes of it would be rather *unlike* Josephus.

The Argument to Progression

G. A. Wells and others have argued that the continuity of the flanking passages works best when no passage about Jesus intervenes. The final thought of the previous paragraph (#2), which deals with Pilate's use of Temple funds for new aqueducts to bring water to the city and the resulting riots in which many Jewish protestors were slain, flows naturally into the opening words of the one following the *Testimonium* (#4): "About the same time another sad calamity put the Jews into disorder." The latter is a remark which does not fit as a follow-up to the closing sentence of the Jesus paragraph (#3) or to its subject matter; the event of Jesus' crucifixion is not portrayed in any way as a 'calamity' for the Jews. Now, it is sometimes suggested that the original passage in Josephus may have been quite different, perhaps including material that was not only hostile to Jesus and his followers but portrayed his execution as somehow redounding negatively on the Jews themselves, which would have allowed it to fit into the "sad calamity" category. This type of suggestion—and it is all too frequent in these discussions—is entirely speculative, and enjoys no support in the evidence. For example, all other versions of the *Testimonium*, including the Arabic and Slavonic texts we will look at, tend to be variants on the same themes that are seen in the standard version, with no hostile or calamitous language in evidence.

The argument about progression is somewhat tempered by the fact that since the ancients made no use of footnotes, digressional material had to be inserted into the main text, as there was nowhere else to put it. However, one might ask whether the *Testimonium* should be considered digressional material, since if authentic it would continue with the theme of Pilate's activities (this is no doubt why it was inserted in that particular place). Whether it would also be in keeping with the theme of woes which befall the Jews is questionable. In any case, one might suggest that, digression or no, once Josephus had written it, his opening words in the subsequent paragraph ought to have reflected, rather than ignored, the paragraph on Jesus.

Furthermore, if Josephus was treating it as a digression, the observation made by Frank Zindler (*The Jesus the Jews Never Knew*, p.42-3) is germane. Josephus does indeed introduce a digression into the next paragraph, one describing "the seduction of the virtuous matron Paulina in the Temple of Isis by Decius Mundus, who pretended to be the god Anubis," thus delaying his actual account of "another sad calamity" that befell the Jews. (The seduction affair has nothing to do with Pilate or the Jews but is simply something that took place "about the same time.") But here, as Zindler points out, Josephus is very clear that this is a digression, for he introduces the account with: "I will now first take notice of the wicked attempt about the temple of Isis, and will then give an account of the Jewish affairs." At its finish he alerts the reader: "I now return to the relation of what happened about this time to the Jews of Rome, as I formerly told you I would." As Zindler says, "No such notice is given to explain his alleged digression into Jesus appearing alive on the third day."

Steve Mason points out (*Josephus and the New Testament*, p.226-7) that the episodes in all the other paragraphs surrounding "are described as 'outrages' or 'uprisings' or 'tumults'." No such characterization is made of the *Testimonium*.

[Josephus] is speaking of upheavals, but there is no upheaval here. He is pointing out the folly of Jewish rebels, governors, and troublemakers in general, but this passage is completely supportive of both Jesus and his followers. Logically, what should appear in this context ought to imply some criticism of the Jewish leaders and/or Pilate, but Josephus does not make any such criticism explicit....So, unlike the other episodes, this one has no moral, no lesson.

Again, we are not entitled to simply posit some different original which contained such features in the absence of any supporting evidence for it.

The Argument to Length

Another argument in favor of a Josephan original is that if a Christian had constructed the entire passage, he would not have limited himself to something so short to describe the career of his Savior. This argument can be set aside, for it would be equally applicable to a scribe who added the extra elements to the presumed original (when making a new copy of the work). Why did *he* not make his additions longer? We cannot know the answer to either alternative.

In fact, the shortness of the passage could be seen as a strike *against* authenticity. If the 'authentic' *Testimonium* is supposed to represent more or less what Josephus wrote, why is it so lacking in detail when compared to that which he gives to his surrounding anecdotes? Such an original passage would pale in comparison to the rich accounts of the crisis over Pilate's attempted introduction into the city of the effigies on the army standards, or the riots over his use of Temple funds to finance the new aqueducts. The related incidents succeeding the *Testimonium* are also very detailed—two scandals happening "about the same time," the second (paragraph #5) resulting in a true calamity for the Jews in that they were expelled by Tiberius from the city of Rome. The first incident in the following chapter, about a 'tumult' which befell the Samaritans at Pilates' hand, is also quite detailed. The argument that the *Testimonium* is too short even for Josephus has been countered by speculating that Josephus could have written at greater length but had most of it chopped because of negativity. But in that case, the interpolator should have felt permitted to insert something of greater length to replace it. And the more material Josephus is suggested to have included, even if negative, the more likelihood Christian commentators before Eusebius would have taken notice of it and undertaken to rebut it. And the more scope an interpolator would have had to give it a different spin.

The Argument to Gospel Character

Supporters of a Josephan original have alleged that the distilled *Testimonium* has virtually no Gospel flavor, whereas the latter would be expected if these lines were from the Christian interpolator. The miracles are only said to be "wonderful works," the Jews are not overly demonized, the "winning over many Greeks" is not a feature of the Gospel picture. But "wonderful works" is how Josephus generally describes miracles, as in the case of the prophet Elisha (*Ant.* IX, 4, 3 / 9.58). And an interpolator masquerading as the Jew Josephus could well have avoided overly demonizing his fellow countrymen; in any case, an unobtrusive criticism of the Jewish leadership is present (something reflective of the Gospel story). As to the last point, an interpolator in a later century would be part of a church now made up of gentiles, and reading the beginnings of that process back into the career of Jesus would be (and was) a natural tendency, regardless of whether the Gospels clearly described it or not.

The absence of any reference to the resurrection—even a skeptical one—in the "authentic" *Testimonium* is an admitted problem for defenders of an original passage. It is hardly likely that Josephus would have been ignorant of this central claim of the Christian faith, and even less likely that he would not have wanted to inform his Roman readers of the Christians' outlandish belief that their founder had walked out of his tomb. Once again, some have postulated that parts of Josephus' original account were cut out, replaced by the new Christian material. But, once more, this is unfounded speculation, for no version of the *Testimonium* that we possess hints at a different treatment by Josephus of the Christian doctrine of the resurrection, a treatment that would almost certainly have been characterized by skepticism or ridicule.

Witness to the *Testimonium Flavianum*

Most commentators who argue for an authentic original reconstruct it along these lines:

Now about this time there lived Jesus a wise man, for he was a doer of wonderful works and a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing among us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who in the first place had come to love him did not forsake him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, continues to the present day.

This is invariably described as a "neutral" account. But such an evaluation is not realistic. A passage which describes Jesus as "a wise man" who "performed many wonderful works," who "won over many Jews and gentiles," who was perhaps a teacher of the truth, cannot be described as neutral, and would hardly be viewed as such by Christians. And yet, the startling fact is that during the first two centuries when such a passage is claimed to have existed in all manuscripts of the *Antiquities of the Jews*, not a single Christian commentator refers to it in any surviving work.

This includes Justin (mid-2nd century), Irenaeus and Theophilus of Antioch (late 2nd century), Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria (start of 3rd century), Origen and Hippolytus (early 3rd century), Cyprian (mid-3rd century) Lactantius and Arnobius (late 3rd century).

All these apologists are intimately concerned with defending Christianity against pagan hostility, yet not one of them draws on what may have been the sole example of a non-negative comment on Christianity by an outsider before Constantine's conversion. If a figure of the stature of Josephus had said the things contained in the alleged "authentic" *Testimonium*, can one really believe that every Christian commentator for over two centuries would regard nothing in it as worthy of mention? Defenders of an original testimony to Jesus by Josephus must maintain that every one of those prolific Christian writers mentioned above, along with several minor ones, was motivated to keep silent and deny the most natural inclination to note and address what a famous historian had said about the founder of their faith—despite, in some cases, being willing to address him on other matters.

There is so much in that 'neutral' reconstructed account which Christians could have put a spin on in defense of themselves and Jesus, so much that could have provided succor, support and even ammunition for what those Christian apologists were attempting to do in their writing. Origen alone spent a quarter of a million words contending against Celsus. He draws on all manner of proofs and witnesses to the arguments he makes, including citing Josephus (11 times in several different works). In Book I, chapters 46, 67 and 68 of *Contra Celsum*, Origen reports that Celsus had disparaged the miracles of Jesus, accusing him of having learned his wonder-working tricks from the Egyptians. Origen counters

this by claiming that Jesus' deeds were superior to anything contained in the Greek myths, and that Jesus performed his miracles in order to win people over to his commendable ethical teachings, something no Egyptian trickster could emulate. An appeal here to the declaration by Josephus, a respected Jewish historian, that Jesus had been a "wise man" who performed "wonderful works," would have served to place Jesus and his miracles in the favorable light in which Origen is trying to cast them. (We know that Origen had read the *Antiquities of the Jews*, particularly the 18th book, because in *Contra Celsum* [I, 47] he summarizes what Josephus said about John the Baptist in *Antiquities* XVIII, 5, 2 /18.116-119.)

John P. Meier (*A Marginal Jew*, p.79) offers a questionable explanation for the blanket silence on the *Testimonium* before Eusebius. Meier's argument is that the Christian Fathers would have recognized that Josephus did not accept Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God, or believe that he had risen from the dead. The *Testimonium* witnessed to Josephus' unbelief and was therefore avoided. But should the apologists have found this disconcerting in a non-Christian? They dealt with unbelief and hostility every day, faced it head on, tried to counter and even win over the opponent. Justin's major work, *Dialogue with the Jew Trypho*, did just that. Origen, in his confrontation with Celsus, did not hesitate to criticize Josephus for attributing the fall of Jerusalem to God's punishment on the Jews for the death of James, rather than for the death of Jesus. In fact, Origen calls attention to the very point which Meier suggests Christian commentators shied away from, that Josephus did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah (see below). It hardly seems that the silence on the *Testimonium* by all the apologists prior to Eusebius can be explained in this manner.

Positive or Negative?

As part of their argument that an original *Testimonium* was avoided because of its alleged hostility, some have suggested the possibility of translating certain elements of the *Testimonium* in a more neutral, even disparaging, way. The phrase "wonderful works" [*paradoxn ergon*] may, it is claimed, mean "startling (or unusual) works," something implying no favorable evaluation, perhaps even a denigrating of such works as no better than tricks meant to dupe their audiences. But this would be inconsistent with the succeeding remark about those who "receive the truth with pleasure," which is often included in the 'authentic' original. In any case, the adjective *paradoxos* is regularly used by the writers of the time to convey something positive, even specifically miraculous, such as by Philo in *On the Life of Moses* I, 38 when speaking of the miracles of God in the desert of the Exodus; or by Luke in 5:26 when commenting on the miracles performed by Jesus; or by Origen in *Contra Celsum* I, 6 in the phrase "the wonders which the Savior performed." Josephus himself employs the word in *Antiquities* some 20 times, most of them referring to the wonders or favorable events brought about by God, such as Moses deriving water from striking the rock (III, 1, 7/ 3.35), or the Hebrews enjoying a "wonderful deliverance" from

Egypt (*paradoxou soterias*, III, 1, 1 / 3.1 and II, 16, 4 / 2.345). The phrase itself "*paradoxa erga*," is used in *Antiquities* (IX, 8, 6 / 9.182) to refer to the works of the prophet Elisha. The word never implies something outright negative, except possibly in the mind of the recipient, such as Nebuchadnezzar being gripped with fear at the "surprising" appearance of the ominous writing on the wall that foretold his doom (X, 11, 2 / 10.233).

Thus, that anything other than positively-viewed events and miracles (a phenomenon which Josephus believed in) was intended in the *Testimonium* verse is not persuasive. In the same way, "He drew over (to him) many Jews and many of the Greeks" can also be seen as a positive statement (it is sometimes translated as "won over"). Here, "drew/won over" (*epegageto*), contrary to the suggestion of some, does not imply deception or leading anyone into error, particularly in light of the preceding comment about "men who receive the truth with pleasure" and the succeeding remark that those who had loved him before his death did not forsake him. The attempt to reduce the tone of the *Testimonium* from positive to fully neutral or even negative is a strained one, and seems entirely apologetic. Even were it possible that some of these terms could have been ambiguous enough to be taken in a negative way, this would hardly guarantee that at least some of those Christian writers would not instead have understood them as positive and thus should inevitably have made an appeal to them. In any case, as pointed out, if negativity were perceived in the text, this in itself should have presented no universal impediment to making mention of them. (We can at least be sure that no negativity in any of these phrases was perceived by someone who allegedly only doctored an original *Testimonium*, for they were left standing.)

Chrysostom and Photius

Frank Zindler (*op.cit.*, p.45-48) has called attention to another Christian commentator who, though versed in Josephus' writings and employing them in his homilies, nevertheless makes no reference to any version of the *Testimonium*: John Chrysostom, who wrote late in the 4th century. In Homily 76, he subscribes to the by now well-established Christian view that Jerusalem was destroyed because of the crucifixion of Jesus. He appeals to Josephus as evidence that the destruction was indeed horrific, something that could only be explained by a deed as monstrous as deicide. Also, he says, there can be no truth to the fantasy that Josephus was actually a Christian believer, "For he was both a Jew, and a determined Jew, very zealous." Yet there is no discussion of any Josephan testimony to Jesus himself by Chrysostom, and certainly not to the question of what the historian might have had to say about Jesus' messianic or 'more than human' status. Other homilies by Chrysostom contain other appeals to Josephus, but none to the *Testimonium*. Most striking is Homily 13. Here he says that Josephus imputes the destructive war to the murder of John the Baptist. Nowhere in the extant texts of Josephus is such an imputation to be found, one which also stands in contradiction to statements by Origen and Eusebius that Josephus regarded the destruction of Jerusalem as punishment by God for the murder of

James the Just, the latter being another allegation which cannot be found in surviving texts. (Josephus himself implies at one point that the destruction of the war was due to the Zealot's murder of the former High Priest Ananus.)

Others of Chrysostom's era fail to mention the *Testimonium*. Steve Mason observes (*op.cit.*, p.57) that "during the century after Eusebius there are five church fathers, including Augustine, who certainly had many occasions to find it useful and who cite passages from Josephus but not this one." Interpolations, of course, take time to work their way into other copies and communities.

Such situations, and similar ones in other writers, illustrate the diversity of emendation which various Christian scribes were performing on Josephus in a variety of quarters, most of them seemingly not cognizant of the contradictory or missing material in other copies being used throughout the Christian world. Indeed, that situation apparently continued for centuries. Zindler makes the case (p.48-50) that the 9th century Photius apparently possessed a copy of Josephus which contained no *Testimonium*, nor even the interpolations we conclude were introduced to make Josephus say that the destruction of Jerusalem was due to the death of James the Just, or of John the Baptist. As Zindler says,

Since Photius was highly motivated to report ancient attestations to the beginnings of Christianity, his silence here argues strongly that neither the *Testimonium* nor any variant thereof was present in the manuscript he read. This also argues against the notion that the *Testimonium* was created to supplant an originally hostile comment in the authentic text of Josephus. Had a negative notice of a false messiah been present in the text read by Photius, it is inconceivable he could have restrained himself from comment thereon.

Photius does discuss the *Antiquities* 18 passage on John the Baptist. To think that he would do so yet pass up one about Christ himself—no matter what its nature—is, as Zindler says, quite inconceivable. Photius at a number of points also seems to quote marginal notes from his copy of Josephus, giving evidence of the ease with which such things could have found their way into the original text and given rise to debates about what was authentic to Josephus' own writings. And before leaving Zindler on Photius, we can note a feature that will figure in our discussion of the other Josephan reference to Jesus. The reading in Photius' copy of that allegedly indisputable phrase in *Antiquities* 20, "the brother of Jesus, called Christ, whose name was James," apparently read simply, "James, the brother of the Lord."

Free Paraphrases: Jerome

Much of the debate over the *Testimonium Flavianum* centers on the term "Messiah." Its appearance in the phrase "he was the Messiah" is part of a sentiment which, as it stands, cannot be by Josephus. But could there have been a more neutral sentiment expressed in an original? It is suggested that the line could have read "he was *believed to be* the Messiah." This, in fact, is the language used by Jerome toward the end of the 4th century in his Latin rendition of the *Testimonium* in *De Viris Illustribus* 13. However, the remainder of the

Testimonium as he translates it is so close to the extant version that this is the only significant difference, thus placing in Jerome's version all the dubious elements we have seen and will continue to see which make virtually the whole passage difficult to accept as authentic to Josephus. Can we reasonably expect therefore, that this one phrase, more innocent than Eusebius' recorded version of it, somehow survived intact and reflects a Josephan original thought, while almost everything else has to be set aside as impossible or highly questionable? That does not seem feasible.

What might be more feasible is that the two versions of this key statement represent two stages of Christian doctoring. Jerome would need to be working from a different Christian text than Eusebius, since the two versions of the Messiah statement are incompatible. On the other hand, might it be possible that Jerome did not find the phrase "he was believed to be the Messiah" in a Greek copy of Josephus but himself altered the text of Eusebius' *Testimonium* to so read, realizing that Josephus would not have been likely to say outright that "he was the Messiah"? Louis H. Feldman [*Josephus, Judaism and Christianity*, p.58] has made such a suggestion in regard to the Arabic version in which the phrase appears in yet another form: "he was perhaps the Messiah." Feldman remarks: "This may have been due to Agapius' realization that, as a Jew, Josephus could hardly have accepted Jesus as the Messiah; and so, like Jerome, he qualifies Josephus' statement." Feldman is suggesting that Jerome was indeed responsible for the unique reading of his "he was believed to be the Messiah," a not unreasonable possibility. Besides, Jerome worked much of his life in the Levant, the same region as did Eusebius and shortly after him, so the likelihood of him having access to a different manuscript line than Eusebius, with a different interpolation of the *Testimonium*, is less easy to postulate.

Feldman (as do others) discusses ever more distant relatives of divergent *Testimonium* appearances, in the Latin Pseudo-Hegesippus (a product of the late 4th century and once attributed to Ambrose) and the Hebrew "*Josippon*" (a late Jewish paraphrase of Josephus which seems to be dependent upon Pseudo-Hegesippus), as well as in the Slavonic version we will look at. In all of these, the passages akin to the *Testimonium* are only 'reminiscent' of the standard *Testimonium* we find in our surviving manuscripts of the *Antiquities*, all have taken significant liberties. Commentators usually interpret such passages, indeed the entire works they are found in, as "free paraphrases" of Josephus, all of which leads to ever more theories and speculations about what an 'authentic' *Testimonium* could have contained. But it is all brittle conjecture, since a much more sensible interpretation is that such "free" renderings are the product of their authors. Indeed, Feldman makes the point that these works should be regarded as "histories in their own right," whose authors felt free to cast according to their own styles and interests, drawing on a variety of other material as well. Thus, we need not postulate that Pseudo-Hegesippus or Agapius or the Slavonic author was being faithful to some unknown, and perhaps authentic, version of Josephus, but that each one freely paraphrased whatever texts he had inherited.²⁰⁹

Such a principle, as intimated above, could have extended to Jerome's unique wording of the *Testimonium's* reference to the Messiah. Furthermore, Feldman (p.57) notes a curious statistic. In his writings, Jerome cites Josephus "no fewer than 90 times and refers to him as a second Livy (*Epistula ad Eustochium* 22), (but) he cites the *Testimonium* only this one time." Might a copy of an authentic Josephus which Jerome possessed have failed to contain it, and he drew on one which did (or more likely on Eusebius' 'quote' of it) when the need was too pressing? Feldman, after reviewing the lack of witness to the *Testimonium* both before and after Eusebius remarks: "To be sure, this is the *argumentum ex silentio*, but as a cumulative argument it has considerable force." And so it does.

Eddy and Boyd (*op.cit.*, p.197) note Jerome's failure to use the *Testimonium* anywhere else in his writings, despite a practice of citing Josephus. They argue:

Had Jerome not mentioned the *Testimonium* this one time, critics would have counted him among the number of those whose silence supposedly proves the *Testimonium* did not exist. As it stands, his one reference proves that he did know it existed but simply saw no reason to refer to it—and certainly not as an apologetic. We have every reason to suppose that other early church fathers treated it in a similar fashion.

But in a footnote (#103) they admit: "It is likely that Jerome knew of the *Testimonium* from the copy of Eusebius available to him." This nullifies their argument, for the telltale silence on the *Testimonium* relates to the pre-Eusebian period, and if Jerome derived his knowledge of the passage not from a Josephan manuscript but from Eusebius, his failure to mention it outside of *Illustrious Men* does not serve Eddy and Boyd's purposes. Besides, one writer's failure to do so (for whatever reason) does not provide a blanket excuse for so many before Eusebius to be guilty of the same thing. The significance of the lack of witness to the *Testimonium* through two centuries of Christian writers lies in the fact that *so many* are silent on it, especially during a time when it would have been most useful *for apologetic purposes*, before Christianity became the state religion (which it had by Jerome's time) and was less in need of apology.

In that footnote, Eddy and Boyd further remark (appealing to Alice Whealey) that the claim that Eusebius could have authored the *Testimonium* is "undercut" by their observation that Eusebius and Pseudo-Hegesippus are "independently transmitt[ing]" different 4th century versions of the passage. However, this fails to take into account the "free paraphrase" nature of Pseudo-Hegesippus, whose version fails to reflect anything close to what could be an authentic passage by Josephus. In fact it owes much to the Christian version and could be a paraphrase of Eusebius himself, since it was written a half century after him.

Free Paraphrases: Pseudo-Hegesippus

We can see the invention used by those "free paraphrase" writers quite clearly in Pseudo-Hegesippus. This is a rewriting of Josephus' *Jewish War*, with additional material from other historians, a paraphrase presenting the history of the War in accordance with Christian interests, especially the matter of the

destruction of Jerusalem and the misfortunes visited upon the Jews; from this the author drew the moral that God had abandoned the Jews in favor of the Christians. In Book II, chapter 9, he has been outlining how the Jews have deserved the "punishments for their crimes," particularly the murder of Jesus. He brings in the testimony of Josephus that

there was in that time a wise man, if it is proper however, he said, to call the creator of marvelous works a man, who appeared living to his disciples after three days of his death in accordance with the writings of the prophets, who prophesied both this and innumerable others things full of miracles about him, from which began the community of Christians and penetrated into every tribe of men nor has any nation of the Roman world remained which was left without worship of him.²¹⁰

On this the author then comments: "If the Jews don't believe us, they should believe their own people. Josephus said this, whom they themselves think (is) veiy great...." Upon which he launches into a reading of Josephus' mind in which he alleges that Josephus faithfully recorded history even though he was not a believer. "He does not prejudge the truth because he did not believe, but he added more to his testimony; because although disbelieving and unwilling, he did not refuse."

The author's contention (possibly influenced by Origen) that Josephus did not regard Jesus as the Messiah is governing his remarks here; perhaps it even led him to drop any "he was the Messiah" from whatever source he was using. The author concludes his remarks by saying: "In this the eternal power of Jesus Christ shone forth, that even the leading men of the synagogue who delivered him up to death *acknowledged him to be God.*" Whether the writer thought he could deduce this from whatever record he had of Josephus (perhaps from 'he was more than a man'), or if this was his own "free" contribution, perhaps prompted by another source, it all goes to show that anyone witnessing to the *Testimonium* after it was established in Eusebius apparently felt free to deal with it in any way he wished, governed by whatever impressions of Josephus he might have absorbed or by any ideas about Jesus that had evolved by that time. If Christian writers could alter the texts of their own New Testament according to what they were convinced an older writer meant and *should* have said, they would hardly have hesitated to do the same with a non-Christian historian. The modern industry dedicated to recovering an "authentic" *Testimonium Flavianum* totters on a quicksand of wholesale Christian tampering.

Taken with the negative witness of Chrysostom and Photius, and the contents of Origen to be examined, we have a long picture of widespread if uncoordinated doctoring and re-rendering of Josephus in the direction of Christian interests, effected at various times by various Christian and perhaps other scribes. The variety we encounter points to a melange of manuscript lines with a diversity of amendments, all of it in flux over the first few centuries. The earliest surviving manuscript of Josephus comes from the 9th century, with others to follow before the printing press guaranteed permanent and uniform preservation. The earliest

of the *Antiquities* comes from the 11th century. All of them had passed through the Christian reproduction process. The vagaries of that process had whittled them down to the strongest contenders for survival, and the Christian forgery industry now presented a united front on what the Jewish historian had really said about the presumed founder of their faith.

Josephus and the "Messiah"

Regardless of the wording of the "Messiah" comment in the *Testimonium*, are we to believe that any use of the term can be attributed to Josephus? The word "Messiah" itself never appears in Josephus' writings outside of the two Jesus passages under discussion (*Antiquities* 18 and 20). Nowhere else, in any connection, does he refer to "*Christos*" ("Messiah" in Greek), and he has almost nothing to say about this prominent Jewish myth of a coming savior and king who shall be installed as ruler over the nations—no doubt because of Roman sensibilities (or his own, about a tradition he apparently felt no attraction to). It is generally acknowledged that he has deliberately avoided addressing the subject for politic purposes. The one obvious exception to this—understandable because of its nature—is the passage in *Jewish War* VI, 5, 4 (6.312-13) in which he declares the Roman general and emperor Vespasian to be the fulfillment of ancient Jewish prophecies. But note his language:

But now, what did most elevate them in undertaking this war was an ambiguous oracle that was also found in their sacred writings, how, 'about that time, one from their country should become governor of the habitable earth.' The Jews took this prediction to belong to themselves in particular; and many of the wise men were thereby deceived in their determination. Now, this oracle certainly denoted the government of Vespasian, who was appointed emperor in Judea.

Here Josephus has turned the topic to his own advantage. But as in English, his Greek description fails to make any use of the term Messiah, nor was he led to enlarge on the subject here or anywhere else. All of this makes it highly dubious that he was willing to throw out a passing opinion on Jesus, committed or not, which used the term, especially as he provides nothing in the way of explanatory material to enlighten his Greek and Roman readers as to its significance. (An even greater lack and unlikelihood will be seen in the other Jesus passage which contains the term *Christos*.)

The argument that his readers were expected to be familiar with the term is unpersuasive. Views on the Messiah within Judaism were hopelessly varied—there may not even have been a 'mainstream' widely-accepted view—and to expect the average Roman and Greek reader for whom Josephus was writing to possess even a modicum of knowledge about the diverse and convoluted mythology of Jewish messianic expectation would have been very unrealistic. Moreover, the term was rooted in the word for "ointment" (*chrisma*) and meant, strictly speaking, the anointed one. But all Jewish kings and high priests were "anointed" and thus were, strictly speaking, *Christos*, though the popular myth

about a coming Messiah (*mashiach* in Hebrew) applied to a singular expected figure. (Some Jewish apocalyptic thought seems to have expected two of them.) The point is, any passing knowledge on the part of Josephus' readers with the "*Christos*" subject in Judaism would face this welter of meaning and tradition, and without some guidance by Josephus they would have been left in pointless confusion had he thrown out the bare term in whatever version it may be thought to have appeared in an original *Testimonium*. A pagan readership which was somewhat familiar with Jewish customs might know "anointed" ones chiefly in the context of kings and High Priests, and thus identifying Jesus as "the anointed one" would have been for them entirely misleading. And Josephus would know this.

Even if some of his readers knew of Jewish Messiah expectation, Josephus' linking of Jesus with the Messiah concept would have been further misleading, in that such expectation was in no way fulfilled in Jesus, and certainly not in any 'authentic' portrayal of him in all those reconstructed or postulated versions of an original *Testimonium*. Could Josephus seriously expect no puzzlement on his readers' part by his attachment of the "Messiah" term to one who had been ignominiously crucified and never came close to becoming king of the Jews, let alone of the nations? His readers may well have wondered how anyone, Jew or gentile, could have come to believe that this executed preacher and miracle-worker had been the Messiah of Jewish prophecy, a wonderment that would have extended to their curiosity over why Josephus was presenting them with such an unexplained conundrum. Since Josephus lived and wrote his work in Rome, a member of Roman aristocratic society, he was surely aware of all this complexity and peril inherent in the subject of the *Christos*, and of the necessity to explain it in detail. If for no other reason, it is likely he would simply have avoided the term and subject altogether in any connection with Jesus.

Steve Mason makes the observation (*op.cit.*, p.228) that "in Greek (*Christos*) means simply 'wetted' or 'anointed.' Within the Jewish world, this was an extremely significant term... But for someone who did not know Jewish tradition or Christian preaching, the rather deliberate statement that this Jesus was 'the wetted' or perhaps 'the greased' would sound most peculiar."

Perhaps because of such considerations, most reconstructions of a Josephan "original" have avoided including any version of a reference to "the Messiah." But this creates another quandary. The final statement, universally included in such reconstructions, has Josephus saying: "And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, continues to the present day." If Josephus had made no reference to the *Christos* previously, what sense would this make to the reader? Linking the tribe known as "Christians" to the figure of "Jesus" and saying that it was named after him would be a hapless non-sequitur in the absence of any reference to the term "Christ" to properly elucidate the word "Christians."

And what of the statement by Origen that Josephus did not accept Jesus as the Christ? It is often claimed that it constitutes an oblique reference to an original *Testimonium* which was silent on such a thing, or to one that was openly

hostile to Jesus. The latter possibility is sometimes treated as a 'slam-dunk' argument in favor of *some* mention of Jesus by Josephus. But rather than assume that Josephus' *silence* on the matter within a discussion of Jesus would impel Origen's comment or speculate that the historian had openly denied it, something we have no textual evidence for and a lot of contraindication, we should look for some *positive* piece of information in Josephus which could have led Origen to make such a statement, even in the context of Josephus having made no reference to Jesus whatsoever. A good candidate is his declaration in *Jewish War* VI, 5, 4 just mentioned, that Jewish prophecies were really about the victorious emperor Vespasian. This statement, which left no room for Jesus as the promised Messiah, could well have been sufficient to prompt Origen's comment that Josephus did not believe in Jesus as the Christ. Of course, Origen would have been assuming a knowledge of Jesus on Josephus' part, even in the absence of any *Testimonium* in his copy of the historian's work. Just what that assumption rested on we will see during examination of *Antiquities* 20.

The Table of Contents

G. A. Wells, Frank Zindler and others have pointed out that our Greek manuscripts of Josephus contain tables of contents for each book of the *Antiquities*, and there is evidence that such tables were already attached to Latin manuscripts of the work as early as the 5th century. H. Thackeray, as quoted by Zindler (*op.cit.*, p.51) stated that the chapter headings "are ostensibly written by a Jew," and "though it is improbable that these more elaborate chapter headings are the production of his [Josephus'] pen, they may well be not far removed from him in date." The Table of Contents for Book 18 lists 20 topics dealt with in the book, but there is no mention of the *Testimonium* among them. Admittedly, the list is not exhaustive. In chapter 3, the Table mentions the contents of paragraph 1, Pilate's attempt to bring effigies of Caesar into the city and the protests of the people, but fails to make mention of the aqueduct affair immediately following. It jumps to paragraph 5 on the expulsion of the Jews from Rome by Tiberius and from there to the main subject of the next chapter, Pilate's slaughter of some Samaritans and his resulting dismissal from his post as governor of Judea.

If Thackeray's impression is correct, we might envision a Jewish editor drawing up a Table of Contents for the *Antiquities* early in its publishing history and not bothering to put in mention of a short passage on Jesus; although even if this were as early as the 2nd century in Rome, one might suppose that Christianity was gaining a profile in the city by then; this being the only discussion of any sort by Josephus on this new religion, even a non-Christian editor might have felt drawn to make note of it in the contents table. As Feldman says, "one must find it hard to believe that such a remarkable passage would be omitted by anyone, let alone a Christian summarizing the work."

Why no later Christian scribe interpolated such a thing, particularly following its witness in the time of Eusebius, is something of a mystery, especially since a Latin contents table of the 5th century suffered the insertion of "Concerning John

the Baptist" where it fails to be noted in the Greek table. We should also note that the Table of Contents for *Antiquities* 20 contains no mention of Ananus' execution of James, brother of Jesus. While this reference constitutes only a few words in a chapter concerned with the fate of Ananus and the governorship of Albinus, we might expect a Christian editor to be similarly led to insert such a reference to commemorate the assumed death of James the Just. Yet there is no sign of such an entry in any Greek or Latin contents list.

The silence of the contents tables suggests the likelihood that no *Testimonium* originally stood in chapter 3 of Book 18, but it would also seem to indicate that the insertion of such a reference at the time of interpolation of the *Testimonium*, or even of a reworking of an existing passage, was ignored. Perhaps at such a time the Table of Contents had not yet been added to Josephus' works, and later when it was, putting in a reference to the interpolated passage was simply overlooked. In any scenario, the failure may be curious, but it is also yet another nail added to the *Testimonium's* coffin.

The Silence of *Jewish War*

In Josephus' earlier work, *Jewish War*, it has long been noted that there is no mention whatever of Jesus. In Book II, chapter 9, Josephus outlines (paragraphs 2 to 4) the same two crises that erupted in Judea under Pontius Pilate as he would later recount in *Antiquities* 18: the bringing of effigies of Caesar on the Roman standards into Jerusalem, and the use of Temple funds to finance the new aqueducts. In the *Antiquities*, these are followed by the *Testimonium* to Jesus. The question has naturally been raised as to why Josephus, if in a later work he inserted something about Jesus in close association with these crises, did not mention him at the same point in *Jewish War*.

One might note that the opening of paragraph 4 about the aqueducts, "After this he [Pilate] raised another disturbance," is very similar to the opening of the paragraph in the *Antiquities* following the *Testimonium*': "About the same time also another sad calamity put the Jews into disorder." The former, of course, makes sense in *Jewish War* as introducing the disturbance over the aqueducts immediately following the disturbance surrounding the effigies. The latter, on the other hand, used in *Antiquities* to introduce the calamity of the Jewish expulsion from Rome, does not immediately follow the earlier disturbances. Instead, it finds itself following on the *Testimonium*, interfering with the logical connection to the previous 'sad calamity' of the aqueduct affair. The near-identical nature of those respective opening lines suggests once again that in the *Antiquities*, just as in *Jewish War*, the reference to "another sad calamity" in the opening of paragraph 4 was designed to follow immediately upon an incident of similar nature, namely the aqueduct affair of paragraph 2, not upon anything resembling the *Testimonium*.

Ancient Christians must have been painfully aware of the void in *Jewish War*, for although no corresponding passage (that we know of) was interpolated into the work to remedy the omission, we do have a few manuscripts of *Jewish*

War in which the *Testimonium* itself, from the *Antiquities*, was inserted, either at the beginning or the end of the manuscript, or in one case at the end of Book II. *Jewish War* also contained no paragraph on John the Baptist such as appears in *Antiquities* 18, and this too was similarly inserted in some manuscripts. (We will look later at whether the Baptist passage in *Antiquities* 18 might be interpolated as well, with the consequence that Josephus said nothing about that figure.)

Josephus and the Neronian Persecution

But there is another silence in Josephus that ought to be brought into the mix. Josephus has nothing to say about the Great Fire at Rome in 64 CE and the persecution of Christians which allegedly followed. It might be said that the fire was not germane to any of Josephus' topics, neither to Jewish history nor to the Jewish War, and there was no need for Josephus to mention it. On the other hand, Josephus often introduces passages about some event or other that is equally non-germane to his main themes, such as the very paragraph which follows on the *Testimonium* in *Antiquities* 18, about the seduction of the Roman matron Paulina, which involves neither Jews nor the war. But whether it was specifically pertinent or not, Josephus' silence on the Great Fire actually has repercussions. There is no doubt that once Josephus took up residence in Rome after the Jewish War, he would have learned—if he had not already—about the fire and seen its consequences. Robert Eisler suggests that he was actually in Rome at the time of the fire, but this is doubtful. In his *Life* (3 / 13-16), Josephus talks of his voyage to Rome in his "twenty-sixth year" which would be about 62-63 CE, but although he does not say precisely how long he stayed, it does not seem that it was for long, and if the fire had occurred during his visit, it would be incredible if he did not mention it.

If the passage about Christ in Tacitus' *Annals* is authentic (though this is something on which doubt will be cast in the next chapter), and Christians were slaughtered by Nero as scapegoats for the fire, that too is something Josephus would have learned about. This would have brought Christians as a movement into his line of vision very dramatically and with it the figure of Jesus. He should almost certainly have been led to investigate them and become familiar with their beliefs and with the reputed activities of their founder. And yet, as we are discovering here, all the evidence points to him saying nothing about Jesus and Christianity in all of his works. We might even have expected that a Josephan passage about Jesus and Christianity would have included a reference to the Neronian persecution and with it the fire, since both would have been dramatic and colorful enough to interest him and his readers; and yet there is no hint in any version of the *Testimonium*, or in Josephus anywhere, that such an event with such a connection was to be found. Moreover, if he had included such a reference in an original *Testimonium* or anywhere else, there would have been no reason for later Christian editors to remove it, as it would have witnessed to one of the great persecutions and martyrdoms in Christian history, something of which Christians tended to be proud.

Of course, the other repercussion is on the Tacitus passage itself. If Josephus had any knowledge of and interest in Christianity, the event of the Neronian persecution of Christians would have impressed itself upon him and heightened that knowledge and interest, even if the reality of the matter did not include an historical founder. Since neither the fire definitely, nor Christians and Jesus probably, are to be found in Josephus' works, it calls into question the integrity of the Tacitus passage where the role of Christians and Christ are concerned. This will be thoroughly investigated in the next chapter on Tacitus.

The Language of the *Testimonium* and the Role of Eusebius

The first sign of the existence of the *Testimonium Flavianum* comes with Eusebius, the church historian who wrote early in the 4th century. He quotes the passage exactly as we have it now, with all the pro-Christian elements intact. From Eusebius' time and for the next 13 centuries, no one in Christendom doubted that Josephus had written that Jesus "was the Messiah."

When the authenticity of the *Testimonium* found in all extant manuscripts of *Antiquities* 18 was first questioned by Christian scholars in the late Renaissance, one of the first suggestions was that Eusebius himself had crafted and interpolated it into Josephus. The idea has remained alive since then, even if not held by a majority of those who today regard the *Testimonium* as a complete forgery. One who has made a case for the *Testimonium* being Eusebius' product is Ken Olson in an article for the Catholic Biblical Quarterly ("Eusebius and the *Testimonium Flavianum*").²¹¹

Olson's approach is to examine the language, and this is where we shall do the same, bringing in some of the views of other modern scholars. (One of the latter will be Robert Eisler, in his *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist*, a book responsible for creating a controversial physical description of Jesus himself which will be examined closely in Appendix 14 [p. 701].)

A common argument for a partial authenticity of the *Testimonium* is that it contains Josephan terminology and non-Christian content, but Olson maintains that, overall, the language of the entire *Testimonium* is a better match for that of Eusebius. He starts by pointing out that the *Testimonium* is quoted by Eusebius in three of his works, the *Demonstratio Evangelica* (D.E.), the *History of the Church* (H.E. [*Historia Ecclesiastica*]), both in Greek, and the *Theophany*, extant in Syriac. In all cases, Eusebius calls upon the *Testimonium*, which he identifies as from Josephus' *Antiquities* 18, as a witness to Jesus' good character.

Men Wise and Divine

But this same concern was also present, Olson notes, in a work earlier than all three, the *Adversus Hieroclem*, in which Eusebius "refuted the unfavorable comparison that Hierocles made between Jesus and Apollonius of Tyana." In considering the status of the latter, whom Apollonius' biographer Philostratus called a "sage" (*sophos*), Eusebius says he is willing to consider Apollonius a "kind of sage" (*sophon tina*), whereas Jesus, alone of all men, he designates a "*theios aner*," a "divine man."

But here is the question which Olson does not ask: why, in this earliest work in which he was concerned to cast Jesus in a favorable light, did Eusebius not appeal to the *Testimonium*, as he was to do in similar circumstances in his later works? We can hardly presume that he only discovered Josephus in the interim. There is no reason why the *Testimonium* could not have served his purpose in *Adversus Hieroclem*. What we may very well presume is that in the interim Eusebius decided it would be a good idea to fabricate something by Josephus to serve this purpose. On the other hand, one could object that the *Testimonium* has Josephus call Jesus simply a "wise man" (*sophos aner*), which only places him on the level that Eusebius is (conditionally) according to Apollonius—although the *Testimonium* does go on to suggest that he was "more than a man." Perhaps Eusebius reasoned that Josephus would not have ranked Jesus any higher; it was on the same level, for him, as Solomon and Elisha. So this would have to suffice, and Eusebius compensated by having Josephus augment the "man" status, as well as declare him to be the Messiah. In any case, a declaration by Josephus that Jesus was a "wise man" would have served, in Eusebius' *Adversus Hieroclem*, to counter the accusation by Apollonius' supporters that Jesus was of a lower status than the man of Tyana, and thus Eusebius ought to have been drawn to make use of the *Testimonium* in that earlier work.

Poetic Miracles

In the *Demonstratio Evangelica* (Bk. III, 4-5) Olson points out that "Eusebius promises to refute those who either deny that Jesus worked any miracles at all, or that if he did, it was by wizardry and deception." Immediately thereafter, he produces a passage by Josephus which in its opening sentences declares Jesus to have been "a maker of wonderful works" (*paradoxon ergon poietes*). This Greek phrase Olson identifies as

...markedly Eusebian. *Poietes* never occurs in Josephus in the sense of 'maker' rather than 'poet,' and the only time Josephus combines forms of *paradoxos* and *poiied* is in the sense of 'acting contrary to custom' (*Antiquities* XII, 2.11 / 87) rather than 'making miracles.' Combining forms of *paradoxos* and *poiied* in the sense of 'miracle-making' is exceedingly common in Eusebius, but he seems to reserve the three words *paradoxos*, *poiied*, and *ergon*, used together, to describe Jesus (*D.E.* 114-115, 123, 125; *H.E.* I, 2.23).

Robert Eisler confirms (*op.cit.*, p.53) that in Josephus *poietes* "always means 'poet,' whilst in the meaning of 'doer' or 'perpetrator' it is frequent in Christian writers." Steve Mason (*op.cit.*, p.231) is another who confirms that to Josephus *poietes* elsewhere consistently means poet.

Winning over Jews and Greeks

In regard to "he won over many Jews and many Greeks," Olson identifies this as reasonably Eusebian, in contrast to those who claim that a Christian would have been able to tell from the Gospels that Jesus never preached to

Gentiles nor, apart from the odd contact, consorted with them. I have often said that Christian believers have always attributed anything they needed at any given time to Jesus and the New Testament writings, even in the face of the evident contradictions and lack of support for such attributions in the record. (To such ends they often deliberately altered that record.) Olson demonstrates this by noting that Eusebius himself attributed gentile contact to Jesus: "by teaching and miracles he revealed the powers of His Godhead to all equally whether Greeks or Jews" (*D.E.* 400). This, despite Matthew's directive put into Jesus' mouth that his disciples should not go to the gentiles.²¹²

Olson further notes that "the paired opposition of Jews and Greeks is especially common in the first two books of the *Demonstration* Josephus, on the other hand, ought to have been less concerned with pairing the two; and his winning over of Greeks, if we were to accept the Gospels as accurate on this question, could not have been based on factual tradition such as Josephus is usually alleged to have been drawing on.

Olson finds further marks of Eusebius in the *Testimonium* line that "even though Pilate condemned him to the cross, those who had loved him did not cease (to do so)." He points out that "this is Eusebius' central argument in *D.E.* III, 5." There Eusebius suggests that if Jesus were really a deceiver, or charlatan, surely his followers would have abandoned him after his ignominious death, and not remained faithful to him and his message. It seems quite a coincidence that in conjunction with saying this, Eusebius produces a Josephan text which also records the very fact that Jesus' followers remained faithful. Besides, such an implied laudatory comment on the movement in the *Testimonium*, because of its very nature, would be unlikely on the pen of Josephus.

The line about Jesus rising on the third day as the prophets had foretold, while admitted by scholars to be a Christian insertion into whatever Josephus might have written, also fits closely with Eusebius' agenda and argumentation in the *Demonstratio*. He has been arguing that "ancient prophecy, specifically Jewish prophecy, had indicated who Jesus would be and what he would do. His miracles are not to be set aside as based on magic but are to be accepted as predicted by the prophets." We ought to marvel at the convenience with which so many elements of the *Testimonium* have served Eusebius' arguments.

Up Until Now

There are interesting features in the final phrase, "until now, the tribe of the Christians, who are named after him, has not died out." Olson observes that in *Adversus Hieroclem* Eusebius argues that, unlike Apollonius of Tyana, Jesus has had effects which have lasted "up until now." Jay Raskin, a self-published researcher active on the Internet, in *The Evolution of Christs and Christianities* identifies (p.80-98) a literary fingerprint which he calls Eusebius' "Tell"—a characteristic repeated "writer's trope, a habit that a writer has that is relatively unique to a writer and acts as a fingerprint in identifying that writer's work whenever it appears." Raskin notes that in paraphrasing and even when ostensibly quoting the work of eight writers from eight time periods about eight

different topics, the "same telltale tell" is to be found; it also appears, of course, when Eusebius is speaking for himself.

Raskin quotes several passages from the *Theophany*, *Adversus Hieroclem*, the *Demonstratio* and *History of the Church*, all of which use this characteristic Tell. It is extremely important for Eusebius, as a proof of their veracity and divine nature, that things of the past have survived to this day and continue to be strong. He uses phrases such as "to our times," "even to the present day," "even until now." For example, in the *Theophany*, in discussing Jesus' miracles:

Nor was it only that He impressed on the souls of those who immediately followed Him such power...but also...on those who came afterwards; and on those *even to this present*, and (who live) *in our own times*. How does this not transcend every sort of miracle? [i.e., by other alleged miracle workers]

The final verse of the *Testimonium* fits into this Eusebian "Tell" like another pea in the pod.

In regard to the phrase itself, "*Eis eti te nun*" occurs nowhere in Josephus but is found elsewhere in Eusebius and is a common phrase in the *History of the Church*. Eisler, on the other hand, suggests (p.56) that phrases similar to this are common to Josephus, but he allows that the actual phrase in the *Testimonium*, with its "redundant accumulation of particles" is *zm-Josephan*, something he attributes to "the habit of later scribes." However, we should note that similar Josephan phrases he enumerates, such as "*eti nun*" and "*kai nun eti*" are not found in the context of similar arguments and concerns to those of Eusebius. The Eusebian type of argument seems to be the implication in the *Testimonium*, in that the tribe of the Christians persisting to this day has a positive ring, and is an extension of the thought that those who loved Jesus stayed faithful to him after his death. These ideas of implied approval and praise because something is demonstrated to 'prove' itself by continuing on into the present fit very well with the "Tell" which Raskin has presented as a feature of Eusebius' expression.

Curiously, Eisler claims that the thought of not dying out could imply a negative judgment by Josephus. "The phrase *ouk epelipe* certainly does not imply a wish on the part of the author for their continued growth. For if we say of a party that 'it has not died out yet,' we imply a certain pious wish—a silent hope or, eventually, a certain apprehension that it may some time do so after all." This is surely a strained reading of the text. Nor does Eisler supply any other example of such a thought by Josephus which can be seen to be negative. It is especially unconvincing when it follows on the earlier thought about followers who "loved" Jesus and continued to do so. Here, Eisler is forced to contend that Josephus may only have meant "like" or "admire" so as not to be unrealistically deferential. Once again, in the context such a reading seems strained.

In a similar vein, Eddy and Boyd (*op.cit.*, p. 194), drawing on Meier, maintain that, in regard to the tribe of the Christians not having died out,

there seems to be an element of surprise in this sentence. Josephus is insinuating that, given Jesus's "shameful end...one is amazed to note...that

this group of postmortem lovers is still at it and has not disappeared even in our day." There is in this a distinctly "dismissive if not hostile" tone according to Meier.

But no such insinuation, in either the English or the Greek, can be detected unless one reads it into what is seemingly a very straightforward statement. As noted before, since it follows on the observation that those who had loved Jesus continued to do so—which hardly conveys a snide or derogatory implication—the final phrase implies a sentiment in the same positive vein.

The Tribe of the Christians

In any writer dealing with Jewish history, the word "tribe" is bound to be frequent. Josephus, on the one hand, consistently uses "tribe" to refer to ethnic units, both Jewish and non-Jewish; he never uses it to refer to a religious group. Once, in *Antiquities* XIV, 7, 2, he refers to the Jews as a whole as "this tribe of men," but he is more likely to have in mind the sense of their ethnicity—in fact, this fits the context—rather than their religious identity. Eusebius, on the other hand, while he too uses it in a majority of cases to refer to the tribes of the Jews and of non-Jewish people like the Ethiopians and Paeonians, also applies the term in more imaginative ways, such as "the tribes of living creatures that subsist in the air" (*Praeparatio Evangelica* 7, 22) and "there are countless tribes and families of stars" (*P.E.* 7, 15).

Mason (*op.cit.*, p.232) remarks: "It is very strange that Josephus should speak of the Christians as a distinct racial group, since he has just said that Jesus was a Jew condemned by the Jewish leaders. Notice, on the other hand, that some *Christian* authors of a later period came to speak of Christianity as a 'third race.'" This later thinking is another pointer to the thought being from Eusebius.

Eisler, too, notes (p.56) that "tribe" usually refers to ethnicity, but he claims that "the word *phulon* (is used) also in a pejorative sense, as in English we speak of the 'tribe of politicians' or the 'tribe of the lawyers'." Eisler does not provide any example of this sense in a Greek text, and one wonders if he has wishfully extrapolated from English usage into the Greek. Dictionary support for it can be found in regard to the related word "*ethnos*" (nation, people), but not for *phulon*. From all this Eisler deduces: "The fact itself that *phulon* here does not designate an ethnical unit, but the 'Christians,' makes it clear that the author did not mean to use a term of affection." This is anything *but* clear, especially in the absence of any example of a use of the term by Josephus in an evidently pejorative sense.

The whole matter is complicated by a further phenomenon. The word "tribe" in Greek enjoys two forms: *he phule* (a feminine noun) and *to phulon* (a neuter one). There is no hard and fast distinction between the two, and their usages tend to overlap. In New Testament writings only the former is used. In Josephus both appear, although the former is by far the more predominant. Yet *to phulon* is the form used in the *Testimonium*, which in itself might serve to argue against his authorship of at least that final line. A key question then becomes, how does this choice relate to "tribe" as used by Eusebius? There, too, we find a predominance

of *phule*, but in *History of the Church*, the word *phulon* appears in Bk. III, 33 twice, although both are essentially the same reference. Those two appearances are in the phrase "the tribe of the Christians."

Improving the *Testimonium*

Finally, consider a phrase appearing in the middle of the *Testimonium*. Pilate condemned Jesus "on an accusation by the principal men (*proton andron*) among us." Olson notes that this Greek term is found elsewhere in Josephus—though never with "among us"—but seemingly not in Eusebius. However, this brings us to a very telling observation. This is one of the features of Olson's case which deserves a stronger emphasis: that the two Greek versions of the *Testimonium* presented by Eusebius, the earlier in the *Demonstratio Evangelica*, the later in the *History of the Church* (the *Testimonium* in the latter is the one invariably quoted in all discussions), differ in a few places. One of these is in regard to the phrase in question. "Principal men" appears only in the later version; in the earlier we read "by the leaders among us." What is the best explanation for this? Eusebius was hardly quoting from memory in either case; this was not sacred scripture which he might be expected to know intimately. It is often said that ancient authors relied to a great extent on memory, since it was so difficult to find passages in manuscripts lacking indexes. But in the case of a passage of this length, memory would hardly be relied on, especially when the writer was offering a direct quote of some importance. If Eusebius did rely on a faulty memory, it is surprising he remembered so much of it perfectly accurately.

If, as would be likely, he had a copy of Josephus before him, it is not feasible that he would have made such a mistake when reproducing it on one of the occasions, supposedly the first. No, the better explanation by far is that Eusebius deliberately made this change as a perceived improvement when he came to write *History of the Church*, which removes the phrase from the pen of Josephus. Eusebius also made a notable change in a previous line. The earlier "a teacher of men who revere the truth" was changed to "a teacher of men who receive the truth with pleasure." The new phrases he could have taken from Josephus' vocabulary elsewhere ("principal men" and "with pleasure"), as they appear in other places. And the fact that both of these changes are to be found in all the extant texts of the *Testimonium* in Josephus' *Antiquities* indicates that both earlier and later forms come from Eusebius, since if different versions were extant in various manuscripts we might expect to find a haphazard survival of those two different forms. The conclusion would be that Eusebius composed the *Testimonium* initially for his *Demonstratio Evangelica*, and later refined it for his *History of the Church*.

This would require, of course, that Eusebius then inserted it into his copy of the *Antiquities*, and from there over the centuries it found its way into all copies, as we see it today in the extant manuscripts. That Eusebius would have been able to accomplish this is no more far-fetched than scholarship's general view that some scribe somewhere reworked an original *Testimonium* into the blatantly Christian version Eusebius witnessed to, and this new version eventually became

universal. Indeed, Eusebius, in his position as official Church historian appointed by Constantine, assembling a host of documents and no doubt charged with 'marketing' his work, once finished, to the Christian world, would have been in a position far better than anyone to disseminate any doctoring and forgery he may have been guilty of. Furthermore, future quotations of the *Testimonium* in later Christian writings are often judged to have been taken from Eusebius' *History of the Church* (more widely circulated than his *Demonstratio*), rather than from a text of Josephus, and by such routes, too, would scribes have been led (perhaps at times in all innocence) to take this Eusebian source and put it into manuscripts and copies of Josephus where it was presumed to belong.

That phrase "among us" attached to "principal men" is also a peculiarity. Olson notes:

Josephus elsewhere refers to the "principal men," but he consistently refers to the principal men "of Jerusalem" or "of [or, belonging to] the city," using these phrases instead of the first person plural.

The phrase "among us" is rare in Josephus (six times), and is regularly used adverbially, as in *Antiquities* X, 2, 2 (10.35): "And whatsoever is done among us..." But it is common in Eusebius, as in phrases like "elder brother among us" or "divine martyrs among us," used adjectivally, referring to a noun as in the *Testimonium* phrase. Thus we have yet another inconsistency with standard Josephan practice. Indeed, inconsistencies seem to infect virtually every line of the reconstructed *Testimonium* in favor today. The more 're-doctoring' that must be devised in order to rescue an authentic *Testimonium* from its later Christian depredations, the more the whole exercise falls into discredit and the more modern scholars are forced to ignore the flow of the text and its ideas, which possess a greater 'all of a piece' impression than they might like to admit.

Frank Zindler (*op.cit.*, p.58) suggests that Eusebius probably encountered some primitive form of *Testimonium* already inserted in manuscripts of the *Antiquities*, if only because we have evidence of earlier Christian tampering with the text of Josephus, as witnessed by Origen. But he acknowledges that it would be impossible to tell the difference between a Eusebian improvement of an older insertion and improvements to his own initial invention *ex nihilo*. One could propose in favor of Zindler's opinion the argument that *to phulon* for "tribe" is so markedly a distant second choice for both Josephus and Eusebius that its use could point to some unknown interpolator prior to Eusebius for whom the word would not have been an unusual choice.

Was Eusebius "Telling Lies"?

On the question of the possible Eusebian invention of the *Testimonium*, one needs to consider the ongoing debate over Eusebius' general trustworthiness as a Christian historian. In Book 12 of the *Praeparatio Evangelica* ("Preparation for the Gospel"), the short chapter 31 is devoted to offering a working principle. To put it bluntly, Eusebius contends that it can be permissible and even necessary for the good of the faith to use fiction/deception/lies—depending on how one

chooses to translate the key word "*pseudos*." Here is the passage in its entirety, beginning with the chapter heading (in bold), which has been shown to be by Eusebius, not some later editor:

That it is necessary sometimes to use falsehood as a medicine for those who need such an approach:

[Here quoting Plato's Laws 663e, words spoken by the Athenian character:] "And even the lawmaker who is of little use, if even this is not as he considered it, and as just now the application of logic held it, if he dared lie [*pseudesthai*] to young men for a good reason, then can't he lie? For falsehood [*pseudos*] is something even more useful than the above, and sometimes even more able to bring it about that everyone willingly keeps to all justice." *[Then, quoting words spoken in response by the character Clinias:]* "Truth is beautiful, Stranger, and steadfast. But to persuade people of it is not easy." *[Followed by Eusebius' own further comments:]* You would find many things of this sort being used even in the Hebrew scriptures, such as concerning God being jealous or falling asleep or getting angry or being subject to some other human passions, for the benefit of those who need such an approach.²¹³

Carrier then comments: "...So in a book where Eusebius is proving that the pagans got all their good ideas from the Jews, he lists as one of those good ideas Plato's argument that lying, indeed telling completely false tales, for the benefit of the state is good and even necessary. Eusebius then notes quite casually how the Hebrews did this, telling lies about their God, and he even compares such lies with medicine, a healthy and even necessary thing."

Apologetic efforts here to rescue Eusebius' basic reliability usually focus on watering down the meaning of "*pseudos*" and the intent behind Eusebius' words. But Greek lexicons of the New Testament make no bones about the usage of the word and its relatives in Christian literature: "a falsehood, a perversion of religious truth, practices of a false religion." Bauer: "lie, falsehood, in our literature predominantly with reference to religious matters...deceptive"; as verb: "to lie, tell a falsehood, to deceive by lying"; as adjective: "false, lying."

In classical Greek, the meaning includes "fiction" without any reprehensible intent, but even were we to give Eusebius every benefit of the ethical doubt, it does not change the fact that he is advocating the use of untruth as a device, a "medicine" designed to maintain the healthiness of faith, to cure the disease of misunderstanding and uncertainty. He appeals to Plato's *Laws* as supporting this principle: lying to young men can be beneficial to keeping them on the straight and narrow. It may well be that Eusebius did not want or intend to convey the stark blatancy of "lie," but he is stating and defending his willingness to employ devices which are not factual, that present reality in ways which are not literally true. He gives examples in the Hebrew scriptures, although those he offers are a poor fit to the point Plato was making, that falsehoods can keep the citizens in line and obeying the laws. Thus they are a poor fit to his own point, since portraying God in the Old Testament as possessing human traits is more a case

of 'misrepresenting' him, usually for the purpose of better understanding the workings of God in history. This is as far as Eusebius can go in appealing to the sacred writings, since there is no reason to think that he regards any tale of those writings as an outright falsehood or "fiction." Even allegory is truth in another guise, as Philo presented his reading of scripture.

Roger Pearse, in his website defense of Eusebius,²¹⁴ points out that the Loeb translation of Plato's *Laws* employs the word "fiction" to translate *pseudos*, and suggests that this is the term which should be used in Eusebius' text. Apart from classical scholars being equally sensitive about according disreputable intent to favored classical authors as are Christian scholars to early Christian writers, use of a milder English word is beside the point. It is true the concept of "fiction" need not involve the intention to deceive, although it may. ("His resume was sheer fiction.") But as is often the case, the meaning behind the use of a word will be determined by its context. It is clear that in the context of Plato's *Laws* and the argument for justification which the Athenian speaker is indulging in, such an intent to deceive is there, otherwise the exercise would be ineffective and there would be no concern over providing a justification for it.

Neither is Plato nor Eusebius advocating a simple parable or allegory to embody what they want to get across, a substitute for a more direct explanation. (Explanations of parables and allegories are usually supplied or may be thought obvious to the reader.) Rather, what they are doing is claiming legitimacy for pulling the wool over people's eyes to achieve a desired effect on behavior and belief. Both are suggesting that such people can be misled into thinking that untruths are in fact true.

In any case, intent or degree of blatancy is not the issue. The question is: can we suspect Eusebius of 'pious frauds' in his presentation of Christian history and the sources he claims to appeal to? Does he wishfully invent such things as early lists of bishops, as some scholars have suspected?²¹⁵ If he feels it is useful that a Jewish historian said things in support of arguments he is anxious to make in the service of the faith, was he capable of constructing such fictions himself? When we consider Christianity's known history of forgery, of pseudonymous letters that misrepresent themselves, of interpolations and the doctoring of documents, including canonical ones, the wholesale invention of fraudulent Acts of this and that apostle, letters between Paul and Seneca, missives to the emperor on the part of Pilate recounting the career and trial of Jesus, and so on in vast measure, there is no impediment to allowing such indulgences to Eusebius in his construction of the history of his religion from scattered and incomplete sources. Second only to the Acts of the Apostles, Eusebius' *History* is crucial for understanding the early history of the Church. As the former is quite clearly an idealization and in great measure fictional, there is no compelling reason to regard the latter as any more reliable.

Correspondence with Jesus

Barely a stone's throw from his introduction of the *Testimonium* in Book I, chapter 11 of the *History of the Church*, Eusebius offers the tale of King Abgar

of Edessa who corresponded with Jesus himself (ch. 13). The king asked Jesus, about whose healing miracles he had heard even on the upper Euphrates in northern Syria, to come and heal his own affliction, while Jesus responded that he must complete his mission and return to Heaven and so cannot come himself but will send an apostle in his place. Amazingly, Eusebius produces that written exchange, which he claims to have retrieved from the archives at Edessa and translated himself from the Syriac. It is not entirely clear whether he is claiming that it was the actual originals he saw and that Jesus wrote (or dictated) in Syriac, but this seems to be the implication. Here is the text of these letters as quoted by Eusebius (translation by G. A. Williamson, *History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, p.66-67).

Copy of a letter written by Abgar the Toparch to Jesus and sent to him at Jerusalem by the courier Ananias

Abgar Uchama the Toparch [A.D. 13-50] to Jesus, who has appeared as a gracious saviour in the region of Jerusalem—greeting. I have heard about you and about the cures you perform without drugs or herbs. If report is true, you make the blind see again and the lame walk about; you cleanse lepers, expel unclean spirits and demons, cure those suffering from chronic and painful diseases, and raise the dead. When I heard all this about you, I concluded that one of two things must be true—either you are God and came down from heaven to do these things, or you are God's Son doing them. Accordingly I am writing to beg you to come to me, whatever the inconvenience, and cure the disorder from which I suffer. I may add that I understand the Jews are treating you with contempt and desire to injure you: my city is very small, but highly esteemed, adequate for both of us.

Jesus' reply to the Toparch Abgar by the courier Ananias

Happy are you who believed in me without having seen me! For it is written of me that those who have seen me will not believe in me, and that those who have not seen will believe and live. As to your request that I should come to you, I must complete all that I was sent to do here, and on completing it must at once be taken up to the One who sent me. When I have been taken up I will send you one of my disciples to cure your disorder and bring life to you and those with you.

Eusebius then quotes an 'attached report' to the letters which outlines how Thaddeus came from Jerusalem following Jesus' resurrection and cured not only Abgar but half the population in Edessa of their ailments. The naivete of this whole passage about Abgar is astonishing, be it Eusebius' invention or some previous Christian's, and it should be a stark pointer to the irrational mindset and utter unreliability of anything in the early Christian record. In Thaddeus' mouth is placed a sermon which is a summation of Jesus' work that reads like an expanded Apostles' Creed.

There is not the remotest chance, of course, that these letters are authentic, but did Eusebius himself author them, or was he taken in by some earlier

forgeries that actually resided in Edessa? If the latter, it would speak to an almost unprecedented gullibility even for ancient Christians. (Walter Bauer was of the opinion that the forgery was perpetrated in Edessa and foisted on Eusebius as he was collecting material for his *Church History*.) However, it is the case that no separate witness to these letters is to be found in Christian writers preceding Eusebius, such as Justin, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria or Origen. No one ever took notice of, or mentioned rumors about, an actual letter by Jesus that could be examined in an easily accessible Syrian city. Nor did Eusebius' report of these astonishing documents lead any subsequent Christian commentator to investigate them for himself, although legends surrounding them did develop, especially in Edessa. If Eusebius is claiming that he took the letters from Edessa, it is quite incredible that they did not physically appear later, even to be preserved in the Vatican archives. If they existed anywhere in the early 4th century when an interest in relics of Jesus exploded into Christian consciousness, a letter from Jesus, even if not penned by his own hand, would undoubtedly have been caught up in the mania and carefully preserved as a holy relic. Instead, Augustine and Jerome declared that Jesus left nothing in writing, and in the 6th century, whether on the basis of actual forgeries or simply the outgrowth of their description in Eusebius, a papal Decretum declared the Abgar correspondence apocryphal.

Perhaps the most likely conclusion is that Eusebius simply fabricated these documents himself. If such shameless forgery could be perpetrated or passed on without hesitation by Christianity's new official historian, we can hardly think that he would have hesitated over attributing to Josephus a simple witness to Jesus—even as the Messiah.

Eusebius and John the Baptist

Just before quoting the *Testimonium*, Eusebius has quoted the paragraph from *Antiquities* XVIII, 5, 2 (18.116f) about John the Baptist, as found in all extant manuscripts. However, his link between these passages—"After giving this account of John, in the same part of the work he goes on to speak as follows of our Savior"—suggests that the Baptist passage came first in his copy of the *Antiquities*, rather than a couple of chapters later than the *Testimonium* as it stands now. While this could be simple sloppiness on Eusebius' part, did one or possibly both of these passages suffer insertion in different places, before their permanent locations were arrived at? (Perhaps Eusebius had not yet decided where to place his *Testimonium*, whether in association with the Baptist or with Pilate.) Does Eusebius' presentation suggest that even the passage on the Baptist was a Christian interpolation?

Eddy and Boyd have this to say about it (*op.cit.*, p. 195-6):

If the whole of the *Testimonium* was the work of a Christian interpolator, it seems he would have followed the Gospel pattern and placed it *after* the discussion on John the Baptist, whom all Christians regarded as a forerunner of Jesus.

And yet, that is precisely what Eusebius has implied, that the passage about Jesus came *after* the one about John. On the other hand, in the *Demonstratio Evangelica*, which is judged by scholars to be the earlier written work, Eusebius, in introducing the *Testimonium* (III, 5), says he will quote Josephus, "who in the eighteenth chapter [i.e., book] of *The Archaeology of the Jews*, in his record of the times of Pilate, mentions our Savior in these words..." This would seem to place the *Testimonium* in its extant position (with Pilate), prior to the extant position of the passage on the Baptist. Does this speak to a fluidity of location for both of these passages in the time of Eusebius?

There is no denying that a Christian interpolator of the *Testimonium* had a difficult decision to make. If the passage on John was authentic, he could place it in a position following John. On the other hand, because of the role of Pilate which the interpolator was including in his paragraph on Jesus, it would have seemed to belong in the earlier chapter 3, along with the Pilate episodes. If both of Eusebius' remarks are taken at face value, they are contradictory, unless we allow for some juggling of the Baptist passage. This would be required (thus increasing the likelihood of the latter's interpolation) if the *Demonstratio* is the earlier work, since it would seem that the *Testimonium* occupied its present position from the time Eusebius first refers to (or invented) it.

Further light is thrown on such questions, and the issue of Eusebius' honesty, by what he says immediately following his two quotations from Josephus on John and Jesus:

When a historian sprung from the Hebrews themselves has furnished in his own writing an almost contemporary record of John the Baptist and our Savior too, what excuse is there left for not condemning the shameless dishonesty of those who forged the *Memoranda* blackening them both? And there we will leave the matter. [H.E. I, 11]

Here Eusebius reveals that one of his purposes—if not the main one—is to counter pagan calumny. The *Memoranda*, published by the emperor Maximinus in 311, was alleged by the Romans to be the original and authentic "Acts of Pilate" in which the governor of Judea had reported to Tiberius on his trial and crucifixion of Jesus. Eusebius' remarks indicate that in this *Memoranda* Pilate disparaged both Jesus and John. Such a document, which the Christians accused (no doubt accurately) of being a forgery, was naturally not allowed to survive. Ironically, Christians themselves had forged similar reports in the past, rendering Pilate a Christian sympathizer and praising Jesus as a good and just man capable of performing actual miracles; perhaps the Romans were just giving tit for tat. Conveniently, then, the *Testimonium* has served Eusebius' need to counter and discredit this hostile publication "blackening" Jesus and John. What better situation could exist to justify Eusebius' principle of falsifying something in the interests of defending the faith against malicious and dishonest criticism?

Despite the discussion above, the passage in the *Antiquities* on John the Baptist cannot automatically be labeled a Christian insertion. One indication of authenticity for the Baptist passage is that it is hard to conceive of a Christian

interpolator failing to make a link between John and Jesus, especially on the matter of baptism which the Josephan passage discusses in regard to John. Moreover, the description of John's type of baptism is at odds with Christian interpretation of the ritual. The passage contains no obvious Christian language (If it *was* genuine, this would have provided further incentive to fabricate one on Jesus to complement it, whether by Eusebius or someone previous.) On the other hand, a persuasive case can be made that the passage is an interpolation. I refer the reader to Appendix 13 (p.699).

In sum, should we call Eusebius a "liar" or only a "fictionalizer"? Fictional works, however, by nature alert the reader. Historians will sometimes caution that their works will involve their own paraphrases and analyses of the evidence, but I know of none who advocate *inventing* evidence or knowingly offering false conclusions in order to make history more amenable or easier for the reader's understanding. In a telling comment, Zindler has this to say (*op.cit.* p.34):

Lest it be thought that this expose of mendacity amongst the Church Fathers be a libel concocted by modern skeptics, no less a personage than Cardinal John Henry Newman [1801-1890], in his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, confirmed the utility of prevarication and deception in the service of religion: "The Greek Fathers thought that, when there was *ajusta causa*, an untruth need not be a lie....Now, as to the 'just cause,'... the Greek Fathers make them such as these—self-defense, charity, zeal for God's honour, and the like."

Semantic differences between "lies" and "fictions" are hardly relevant here. Both amount to pious untruths, and neither should be acceptable today—and in fact are not. In a footnote, Zindler tells us that he could locate this quote only in a 19th century publication of Newman: "The quotation is from the appendix, note G. Not surprisingly, this note seems not to have been reprinted in any editions of the *Apologia* produced during the last half of the twentieth century."²¹⁶

Could Josephus have written the "authentic" *Testimonium*?

In addition to the silence in Christian commentators before the 4th century, and quite apart from the indicators that Eusebius himself may have been the perpetrator of the *Testimonium*, other general considerations discredit the idea that Josephus could have penned even the reduced passage advocated by modern scholars.

Distinct from an analysis of the individual words and phrases, the entire tenor of the modern 'authentic' *Testimonium Flavianum* does not ring true for the historian. In the case of every other would-be messiah or popular leader opposed to or executed by the Romans, he has nothing but evil to say. Indeed, he condemns the whole movement of popular agitators and rebels as the bane of the period. It led to the destruction of the city, of the Temple itself, of the Jewish state. And yet the 'recovered' *Testimonium* would require us to believe that he made some kind of exception for Jesus.

On what basis would he do so? If he had possessed an intimate knowledge of Jesus leading to some favorable estimation of the man markedly different from

his usual attitude toward such figures, we would expect much more than the 'authentic' cursory account in *Antiquities* 18. The latter, in fact, amounts to little more than a bare summation of basic Gospel elements. Would Jewish sources have provided a favorable account of Jesus' teachings or activities? Hardly, and certainly not by the 90s, when Jewish leaders were laying anathemas on the Christians. Some raise the idea that Josephus' information came from 'official Roman records,' but such a record would have been even less likely to present Jesus in a positive fashion.

Why, then, would Josephus have made an exception for Jesus? Did he have his own reports of Jesus' teachings, all of which he perceived as laudable? That is difficult to envision. By the late 1st century, if we can judge by the Gospels and even scholarly reconstructions of Q, any commendable teachings of Jesus would have been inextricably mixed with many inflammatory and subversive pronouncements and prophecies of a revolutionary and apocalyptic nature—whether authentic to Jesus or not. If any tradition about Jesus' cleansing of the Temple had reached him, this would have been seen as an expression of the very thing Josephus hated and condemned in all the other popular agitators of the period. (If such an incident had occurred in any degree resembling the Gospels, it would hardly have escaped his knowledge, nor his reporting; he is entirely silent about it.) It is difficult if not impossible to postulate any situation in which Josephus' knowledge of Jesus could have been so selective as to screen out all the objectionable elements, and thus we are justified in concluding that Josephus could never have referred to Jesus as "a wise man," let alone a "teacher of the truth," or spoken of him in any positive or even neutral way.

The same objection applies to the phrase "wonderful works" (which includes the suggested possible alternative translation of "unusual" or "startling works"). Such a phrase, in Josephus' mind, would have placed Jesus into the same class as those popular agitators like Theudas the magician who promised to divide the river Jordan so that his followers could cross over it (*Ant.* XX, 5, 1 / 20.97-8), or the unnamed Egyptian who claimed his command would knock down the walls of Jerusalem (*Ant.* XX, 8, 6 / 20.169f; *War* II, 13, 5 / 2.261f). Would Christian or any other reports filter out the healings (which Josephus could perhaps have accepted as believable or laudatory) from Jesus' reputed miracles over nature, or his Gospel prophecy that the walls of the Temple would tumble? In the same passage with Theudas, Josephus speaks of "imposters and deceivers (who) called upon the mob to follow them into the desert, for they said that they would show them unmistakable marvels and signs that would be wrought in harmony with God's design." Josephus would hardly make any niceties of distinction between these charlatans and Jesus' own activities.

Nor would the Romans. Jesus as the Gospels portray him, a popular agitator attracting vast crowds and working them up with alleged miracles, would have gained the immediate attention of the Roman authorities and raised alarm, leading to Jesus' arrest and undoubted elimination. Palestine at this time was a land in ferment, and we know from Josephus that quick action was taken against

popular agitators such as those just outlined, usually involving their summary execution and the slaughter of those who followed them. It would not have needed the Jewish scribes and Pharisees to plot against him and seek his death. The Romans would have seized and dispatched him themselves.

It is often claimed that Jesus' teachings would not have been cause for such a reaction, as they were of an admirable and peaceful ethical nature. But this view is naive. Anyone who preached to the downtrodden masses that they were going to inherit the earth upon the imminent arrival of God's kingdom would have been seen as advocating and promising the overthrow of present society. Widespread belief in the imminence of the kingdom was already causing disorder. Any encouragement of belief, especially through alleged miracles, that Rome was about to be ousted by divine forces was precisely what the authorities were forced to deal with and suppress throughout most of the 1st century. Such beliefs culminated in the upheaval of the Jewish War. The Roman occupation, no more than Josephus, would hardly have troubled to look into the niceties of Jesus' preaching, and Jesus would not have survived a week.

The report in Tacitus (if genuine), the persecution witnessed in Pliny's letter to Trajan, the *birkat ha-minim* (curse on the heretics) of the Jewish synagogues after Jamnia,²¹⁷ all testify to the hostility and vilification which Christian sects endured at this time. Yet an acceptance of the reduced *Testimonium* as authentic assumes that Josephus, alone of all our non-Christian witnesses, took an opposite stance. It assumes that when all about him were expressing condemnation, he could imply approval and even a touch of admiration for Jesus and the Christian tribe which "had come to love him and did not forsake him." For this is the overriding sentiment that emerges from the reduced *Testimonium*.

The final point to be stressed in this connection is that Josephus was writing under Flavian sponsorship. His readers were primarily Roman, some Jewish. He would have had no reason for being, in Meier's phrase, "purposely ambiguous." He had nothing to fear from Christians and no reason to be concerned over their sensibilities. Regardless of what Josephus may have thought about the character of Pilate (and it was anything but favorable), if Pilate had executed Jesus, then in official Roman and Flavian eyes there had to be a justification for doing so. Crucifixion was a punishment for rebels, and Jesus' fate would have been seen by the Roman establishment as part of the empire's ongoing campaign to deal with the problems of a troubled time in a troubled province.

Yet how, in the reconstructed *Testimonium*, does Josephus deal with the event itself? The words and their context give the impression that the crucifixion was due to "an accusation made by men of the highest standing among us," that this was the execution of a wise and loved man, a teacher of truth who was obviously innocent. Nothing could better reflect the Gospel image. There could be no basis on which Josephus would be led to interpret the event this way, much less put it in writing for a Roman audience. There would have been no channel through which such a judgment would come to him that he would have accepted. And no way he could have avoided explaining himself if he did.

In his autobiography (*Life*, 65 / 363) Josephus declares that the emperor Titus himself "affixed his own signature to them [copies of the original Greek edition of the *Jewish War*] and gave orders for their publication." Josephus wrote at the behest of his Flavian patrons. While he also had Jewish interests, the official Roman outlook coincided with his own outlook. The *Testimonium Flavianum*, in any of its resurrected versions, makes no sense within such a Josephan world picture.

The Arabic Version

A version of the *Testimonium* appears in a 10th century history of the world by Agapius, the Melchite Christian bishop of Hierapolis in Asia Minor. He wrote in Arabic, but his discussion of Josephus is judged to have come from a Syriac source, itself derived from a Greek one, making it at least third-hand. In 1971, Israeli historian Shlomo Pines published a study of Agapius' work and provided a translation of the passage corresponding to the *Testimonium*, as follows:

For he says in the treatises that he has written on the governance of the Jews: At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. And his conduct was good, and he was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. And those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them after his crucifixion and that he was alive; accordingly, he was perhaps the Messiah concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders.²¹⁸

Pines and others have suggested that this version contains elements which go back to Josephus. As with many of the other "free paraphrase" works and the assortment of *Testimonium* versions that have come down to us through tortuous routes, there is little reason to share this confidence. It is true that Agapius' rendition is toned down from that of our extant version first found in Eusebius. It lacks "if he should be called a man," reference to the "wonderful works" and those "who accept the truth with pleasure," for all of which it substitutes "he was a good man and virtuous." It does not mention any role for the Jewish "principal men" in the execution of Jesus, and the final line about "the tribe of the Christians" still going strong is missing. Agapius qualifies the appearing alive after three days with "they [the disciples] reported that..." Thus far, it is said, we have nothing that could not be judged as a natural product of Josephus, although this version differs in many details from the accepted reconstruction of most modern scholarship.

Again, however, we must ask how such an original could have safely found its way through the eight centuries route to Agapius when much of what it contains and what it lacks surfaces nowhere else. It is far more likely that this is yet another free paraphrase (or perhaps successive stages of such a thing) like those to be seen in different forms in other writings.

G. A. Wells notes (*The Jesus Myth*, p.216):

Bammel thinks that Agapius' version may have originated in an Islamic environment, as it states that "Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die," the last three of these words being unrepresented in the Greek. The Koran denies that Jesus was put to death; hence the contrary assertion became of vital importance to Christians in Islamic times.

Can we be sure, then, that nothing else in the Agapius version was influenced by Islamic or other local outlooks, in keeping with the principle active in all free paraphrases to rework according to contemporary conditions, ideology and style?

Not surprisingly, the line most focused on in the Arabic version is "he was *perhaps* the Messiah." This could no more be authentic to Josephus than the line in the Eusebius version: "He was the Messiah," since Josephus would have had no reason to suggest the possibility any more than the certainty. Taken with the deletions in the opening lines and the cautious "they reported that" in reference to the resurrection, there are obvious signs of a watering down of earlier more committed statements such as we find in the extant *Testimonium*.

That watering down could simply be the work of Agapius, reflecting his preference for what Josephus could or should have said. Remember that Agapius is thought to draw on a Syriac predecessor, and yet two centuries after Agapius a version of the *Testimonium* appears in Syriac in the Chronicle of Michael the Syrian. That version still contains most of the elements familiar from the standard text which the earlier Agapius lacked, that Jesus was "more than a man, a worker of glorious deeds and a teacher of truth," along with a committed "he appeared to them after three days," and the statement that the Christian movement still survives. (Michael the Syrian, however, hedges as Agapius does on the matter of Jesus' identity. He says: "He was thought to be the Messiah.")

It would seem, then, that Syriac renditions of Josephus had their own range of content; the version in Michael, even though he wrote later, would predate the one in Agapius, since it is closer to the ancient versions. Eddy and Boyd (*op.cit.*, p. 194) claim that "the Arabic text helps confirm the reconstructed version of the *Testimonium*" since it does not contain two of the most troublesome passages, and a third has a non-committal form. But Agapius as a free paraphrase (on a version like that used by Michael) is the much preferable explanation, especially as Michael's version strongly suggests that the Syriac tradition was rooted in the Eusebius text, not in some prior, more authentic edition of Josephus. Their confident declaration, quoting J. H. Charlesworth, that "We can now be as certain as historical research will presently allow that Josephus did refer to Jesus in *Antiquities* 18.63-64," must be set aside as wishful thinking.

Pines (*op.cit.*, p.77-79) observes that both Agapius and Michael the Syrian seem to indicate that their sources have the title "On the Governance of the Jews." Such an alternative title for the *Antiquities of the Jews* is not to be found anywhere else, indicating a possible unknown manuscript line which has adapted Josephus' original work under a new title. This would be yet another sign of the liberties taken with Josephus through the centuries. The passage in Agapius is preceded by a discussion of Jesus' crucifixion, with accompanying comments

about its attendant astronomical marvels outstripping those of the Gospels, and a reference to letters sent by Pontius Pilate to Tiberius in which those marvels are explained as the heavenly reaction to the crucifixion. This is a prime example of the imaginative and creative forces at work in and behind the writings of such authors who make use of Josephus, and the rashness of thinking that their texts can provide any reliable evidence for an authentic original.

Marian Hillar²¹⁹ points out that "*Jewish War* was translated into Syriac by the 8th century, but there is no indication of a Syriac translation of the *Antiquities*." Thus Agapius and Michael the Syrian are likely to have been using not Syriac translations of the original Josephus work as a whole where they might have found some version of the *Testimonium*, but instead Syriac adaptations of the *Testimonium* itself which could well (as Pines suggests) have been derived from Eusebius' presentation of the passage in his *History of the Church*. The chain of transmission grows ever longer and more uncertain, with ever more opportunity to effect 'free' changes.

Feldman (*op.cit.*, p.58) also styles the Arabic version a free paraphrase based on Eusebius, suggesting that Agapius watered down the Messiah line out of a concern (rare but laudable) for credibility as to what the Jewish historian could reasonably have written. It would seem from the vast and diverse record of the *Testimonium* circus over the centuries that "free paraphrase" became a "free-for-all." Modern scholarly endeavor to arrive at reconstructions of a Josephan original has become part of a continuing Big Top spectacle. This is perhaps nowhere so evident as in regard to the "Slavonic Josephus" texts, with the eccentric early 20th century scholar Robert Eisler as Ringmaster.

The Slavonic Josephus

Sometime around the 13th century a Greek text of Josephus' *Jewish War* was translated into the Old Russian language, incorporating many modifications, deletions and additions. Since its rediscovery in the late 19th century, scholars have analyzed much of those changes as products of the translator in keeping with the interests of the current Slavic Orthodox Church and early Russian politics. But among the additions are eight passages relating to Jesus and John the Baptist which are judged to have been, not the translator's work, but present in some Greek source or sources which the Slavonic author used, whether of Josephus or others. Nothing like them exists in any extant Greek manuscript of Josephus or anything else. The insertion corresponding to the *Testimonium* (#4) is located at precisely the point in *Jewish War* (II, 9) at which Josephus discusses the same events concerning Pilate that he was later to recount in *Antiquities* 18 where the *Testimonium* is found. It has been noted that no such passage, or anything resembling a version of the *Testimonium* or its content, is to be found at that point in any surviving manuscript of *Jewish War*. Does the Slavonic Josephus, then, give evidence that Christian scribes did in fact interpolate the *Testimonium* or something like it into the *Jewish War* passage on Pilate where they would have found it curiously missing?

Possibly so, although the nature and tone of these eight passages is unlike any other Christian interpolations. Johannes Frey in 1908, shortly after they were published in German by Alexander Berendts, decided that they could not be a Christian product but were more likely that of a sympathetic Jew. The first passage is about John the Baptist, preaching and in conflict with the Jewish authorities, but no link is made between him and Jesus, nor is there any echo of the passage about the Baptist now found in the *Antiquities*. The fourth passage the one on Jesus, could be a very free expansion of some form of *Testimonium*, it opens quite similarly—supplemented by a knowledge of Gospel basics; but there is no mention of the resurrection, although that appears in one of the later passages, with references to the torn Temple curtain, the empty tomb, and the guards placed around the grave. In none of it is Jesus referred to as the Messiah, possibly or actually. (A full translation of the fourth passage on Jesus is provided in Appendix 14 as part of a study of Robert Eisler's physical description of Jesus drawn from the so-called *Halosis*.)

Furthermore, there is a curious noncommittal attitude expressed in these passages, exemplified by this in the seventh:

And it was said that after he was put to death, yea after burial in the grave, he was not found. Some then assert that he is risen; but others, that he has been stolen by his friends. I, however, do not know which speak more correctly. For a dead man cannot rise of himself—though possibly with the help of another righteous man; unless he will be an angel or another of the heavenly authorities, or God himself appears as a man and accomplishes what he will...

Here the writer speaks in the first person, whether the Slavonic historian or his source. One can see how the overall tone of these insertions could be doubted as Christian. A general grounding in the Gospels seems evident, yet there is also ignorance of some Gospel features, and the crucifixion itself is assigned to the Jews with Pilate's permission, a responsibility which bears some similarity to the Talmud which invariably presents the Jews as carrying out Jesus' execution with no involvement by the Romans. If the formulator of these insertions was a fairly knowledgeable and friendly Jew, the motive for his work and what readership it was intended to serve nevertheless remains murky.

Whatever the answer to these conundrums, we have here yet another example of the broad imaginative industry devoted over centuries to wedding Josephus to Christian tradition. Perhaps because of the sprawling, hodge-podge nature of the 'Christian' interpolations into Josephus represented by these passages in the Slavonic text, scholars have made little effort to use that text to help formulate their reconstructed *Testimonium* and Josephus' supposed picture of Jesus.

With one notable exception. Robert Eisler used the Slavonic text to penetrate to a literal "portrait" of Jesus by Josephus which has caught the fancy of many as a possible physical description of the Christian founder. But Eisler's methods and the sources he drew on do not support it as having any historical reliability. I refer the reader to Appendix 14 (p.701) for an examination of Eisler's case.

Xhe Galilean vs. the Jerusalem Jesus

In view of modern scholarship's division of Christian beginnings into two separate spheres of response to Jesus, some final observations on the reliability of the *Testimonium Flavianum* are in order.

In any location outside Palestine and Syria, all the evidence concerning Christianity in the latter 1st century relates to the cultic expression of the Pauline type. Here Jesus is the cosmic Son of God, creator and sustainer of the universe, source of salvation through his death and resurrection. That evidence, as seen from writings like the New Testament epistles of the 1st century, Revelation, 1 Clement, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Odes of Solomon, has nothing to say about the Galilean side of things, about the ministry as portrayed in the Gospels and Q—nor about Jesus' death under Pilate.

If we can assume that Josephus, writing in the 90s, would reflect views of Jesus current among Christians in Rome at the time, how do we explain the fact that the *Testimonium* says nothing about the cultic Christ of Paul, the redemptive Son of God who was an exalted divinity? Such cosmic claims and descriptions about the Son as are found in the 1st century epistles would have been a part of the Christian ethos which Josephus was exposed to. (Paul addresses the Roman congregation in those terms, indicating that this is the way Roman Christians regarded Jesus. 1 Clement, written in Rome and roughly contemporary with Josephus, speaks in similar terms about the spiritual Christ.)

If Christians were going about talking of their founder in terms familiar to us from the epistles, this elevation of a crucified criminal to the very status of divine Son of the God of Abraham would hardly have been ignored by Josephus. For Josephus was intimately concerned with his Jewish heritage, its traditions and beliefs. The natural affront to Jewish sensibilities in the fundamental Christian doctrine about Jesus, its blasphemous association of a human man with God and the bestowing on him of all of God's divine titles, would have received the closest attention from the historian, and inevitably his condemnation.

Nothing in the *Testimonium* breathes a whisper of the Pauline Son of God. Instead, it sets its sights no higher than the Gospel-like picture of a remarkable sage who was crucified and gave rise to a new movement. With the addition of the resurrection, this is essentially Mark's amalgamation of the Q ethos with a passion narrative. This absence of any dimension relating to the cultic Christ is further evidence that the *Testimonium* is a product of 2nd, 3rd or even 4th century Christian outlook, one in which the Gospel picture predominates, while the earlier cosmic Christ has receded into the shadows behind it.

In regard to the Jesus of Q, if its founder figure were responsible for a movement as extensive as the record makes it out to be, that role should have been reflected in what Josephus may have said of him. Instead, the *Testimonium* Jesus is an isolated figure, a "wise man" and a miracle worker. Moreover, this Q founder gave no indication that he ever went to Jerusalem to be crucified, and thus an 'authentic' Josephan passage would have been unable to include his death under Pilate, since no such event would have happened.

II: The Brother of Jesus, (the One) Called Christ

The second passage referring to Jesus is found in *Antiquities of the Jews* Book 20 (9, 1 / 197-203). Defenders declare the key phrase (in bold) to be more reliable than the recovered *Testimonium* as authentic to Josephus, and that there is a virtual consensus among scholars as to that authenticity.

This is the passage as it now stands:

But the emperor, when he learned of the death of Festus, sent Albinus to be procurator of Judea... But the younger Ananus who, as we have already said had obtained the high priesthood, was of an exceedingly bold and reckless disposition.... Ananus, therefore, being of this character, and supposing that he had a favorable opportunity on account of the fact that Festus was dead and Albinus was still on the way, called together the Sanhedrin and brought before them **the brother of Jesus, (the one) called Christ** [*ton adelphon Iesou tou legomenou Christou*], James by name, together with some others and accused them of violating the law, and condemned them to be stoned. But those in the city who seemed most moderate and skilled in the law were very angry at this, and sent secretly to the king, requesting him to order Ananus to cease such proceedings.... And the king, Agrippa, in consequence, deprived him of the high priesthood, which he had held three months, and appointed Jesus, the son of Damneus.

All manuscripts of the *Antiquities* show essentially the same phrase. But we have nothing earlier than the 11th century, and by then one of the universal tendencies in manuscript transmission, that all copies of a well-known passage gravitate toward the best-known wording, as well as toward the inclusion of the passage itself, would have ensured that this reference to Jesus in its present form would long since have been found in all copies.

The phrase about Jesus basically serves to identify "James." This inclusion of an identifying piece of information, say those arguing for its authenticity, is something Josephus does for most of his characters. True enough, but this does not necessarily guarantee that he did it in this case, or that the present phrase is the original one; Josephus may have said something else which a Christian scribe later changed. On the other hand, if Josephus knew nothing else about this James or chose not to say anything more, he would have used some equivalent to "a certain James" or "someone named James." And this in fact is what is found in the Greek. The words referring directly to James are: *Iakobos onoma autoi*. Translations render this "James by name" or "whose name was James" or "a man named James." Such a phrase could have stood perfectly well on its own (with a change in grammatical form), with the reference to a brother Jesus added to it by a Christian interpolator. (We will also see that "the brother of Jesus" could be authentic to Josephus, though not as a reference to Jesus of Nazareth.)

As Eddy and Boyd admit (*op.cit.*, p. 188), if we were to assume that he is referring to the Christian James, one could ask why Josephus would identify him this way, since his readership "arguably would have known no more about Jesus

than they would have about James." On the other hand, if Josephus had written some version of the *Testimonium* two books earlier in the *Antiquities*, might the reader have been expected to link the reference in Book 20 with it? Would the latter's phrase have been considered sufficient as a "referring back" to that particular Jesus character earlier mentioned? In an Internet article,²²¹ Steven Carr notes that when going back some distance, Josephus tends to orient the reader toward the earlier mention of the figure and bring back to mind what had been said about him. Carr provides several examples, such as this one:

Judas was also in *Antiquities* 18: "Yet was there one Judas, a Gaulonite, of a city whose name was Gamala, who, taking with him Sadduc, a Pharisee, became zealous to draw them to a revolt, who both said that this taxation was no better than an introduction to slavery, and exhorted the nation to assert their liberty." Josephus referred back to Judas in *Antiquities* 20: "the sons of Judas of Galilee were now slain; I mean that Judas who caused the people to revolt, when Quirinius came to take an account of the estates of the Jews, as we have shown in a foregoing book."

In the later book, this reference back contains several details, including the stated point that Josephus is referring to an earlier described figure. By contrast, "called Christ" in the Ananus passage is sparse. It would hardly be enough to carry the reader back to a short paragraph two books earlier, and especially if it originally contained no reference to the "Christ." If there had been no *Testimonium* at all, the phrase "called Christ" in *Antiquities* 20 would be left on its own, with a completely inadequate identification of its "Jesus."

Without the reference to Jesus, the passage makes good sense and does not jar within the context. The passage is not about James—much less about Jesus. It is about the high priest Ananus and his fate. Ananus was deposed because he had executed "a man named James and certain others," an act which incensed some of the influential Jews of the city. The reader did not need to know anything else about those who had been stoned.

As a Marginal Gloss

It is important to note that the phrase is actually made up of two distinct parts. This James is identified as "the brother of Jesus," but this Jesus is himself identified as "called Christ." The possibility of interpolation, then, could apply to either the composite reference, or only to the second element. Both options have been proposed, beginning with the simplest process, namely that "James" stood alone in the original text and a Christian scribe added a marginal note, "the brother of Jesus, called Christ," the scribe assuming that it was the Christian James the Just that was being referred to, perhaps in light of a tradition that this James had died around that time. Alternatively, the original text may have included "the brother of Jesus" as Josephus' identification of his James, and a marginal note, "called Christ" served to identify the Jesus the scribe believed Josephus was speaking of. In either case, the marginal note was subsequently inserted into the text. In view of the difficulties, as shall be seen, which are

involved in envisioning Josephus as the author of the composite phrase, and especially its second part, the marginal note would be the simplest and most effective explanation.

It is occasionally suggested that the entire passage could be a Christian interpolation, since in *Jewish War* (IV, 5, 2 / 4.318-21) Josephus talks of Ananus' conduct during the war in terms that are entirely complimentary, in contrast to the *Antiquities* passage which is quite critical and unfriendly toward him. A Christian could be killing two birds with one stone in making Josephus speak of Jesus' brother James while casting aspersions on the man who had executed him. But this fails to take into account that Josephus, between his two works, occasionally presents things differently and even changes his mind in his evaluation of people and events, presumably based on revised judgment or further knowledge acquired in the interim. The passage as a whole fits too well into its surrounding context for it to be a likely later addition.

Jesus Who?

Some have suggested that Josephus actually did write "brother of Jesus" but was referring to some other Jesus. There are 21 different Jesus figures in Josephus, one of which can be seen at the very end of the passage in question, "Jesus son of Damneus." Both "Jesus" and "James" were very common names at this time, and four of the High Priests who served between the death of Herod the Great and the destruction of the Temple in 70 bore the former name. It is possible that it is this "Jesus son of Damneus" who is being referred to. He may have had a brother named James whom Ananus executed along with some associates for reasons unknown. ("Violating the law" does not tell us the reason, and even were it the Christian James being referred to, we would not know the specific reason for his execution). There could be a natural link between this Jesus having his brother murdered by the current High Priest and being subsequently appointed to that position in the deposed Ananus' stead; we are just not told enough to know.

One proposed objection to this is that the identifying patronymic "son of Damneus" has been delayed until the later reference to him in the passage, rather than being included with the first reference. This, however, while perhaps creating an odd effect (since an author usually includes the identifying phrase with the first appearance of someone), is not unknown in Josephus. Perhaps a preoccupation with Jesus' brother James at the initial spot led Josephus to delay the patronymic identification for a few lines. This deviation from the norm does not preclude the first reference to "Jesus" being to Jesus son of Damneus.²²²

There is a suspicious aspect to the reference to Jesus, in that it comes *first* in the text. That is, the passage reads: "(Ananus) brought before them the brother of Jesus, called Christ, James by name, together with some others..." Why would Josephus think to make the *Jesus* idea paramount, placing it before the James one? James is the main character that brought about Ananus' downfall, while mention of Jesus is supposed to be simply an identifier for him. It would have

been much more natural for Josephus to say something like: "(Ananus) brought before them a man named James, who was the brother of Jesus, called Christ..." On the other hand, if the phrase is the product of a Christian scribe, it would be more understandable that he, consciously or unconsciously, would have given reference to Jesus pride of place. (We will revisit this point later [note 224] when examining other appearances of this phrase in Origen and Eusebius.)

This remains a valid consideration, but there could be another way of looking at it. As R. G. Price points out,²²³ if the passage is essentially about the fall of Ananus and the rise to the high priesthood of the son of Damneus in his place, then a reference to this Jesus ahead of his brother who was the victim of Ananus might be understandable on Josephus' part, since the fundamental *raison d'être* of the whole passage would be to relate the supplanting of the High Priest Ananus by Jesus son of Damneus.

Such an understanding would render Josephus consistent in that he is discussing figures pertinent to the time of Ananus and the Roman governors Festus and Albinus (who are included in the focus of this chapter). This makes much better sense, as Price points out, than to imagine that Josephus would suddenly identify his James by linking him "to a person whom the Jews had supposedly killed as a common criminal some 30 years (earlier), and 60 years prior to this writing." Price adds: "Christians argue that this was done because 'Jesus Christ' was so well known that it makes the passage make sense, but as we have seen, no one prior to Josephus had written about Jesus Christ aside from some Christians, so it certainly does not seem that he was well known." Eddy and Boyd (*op.cit.*, p. 189) fail to consider such an objection when they suggest that Josephus "merely wanted to identify James by specifying his well-known brother." We have no evidence, not even from Christian documents outside the Gospels, that anyone knew, well or otherwise, a Jesus of Nazareth called Christ around the year 90 when Josephus was writing. And certainly not in Rome. Even the first Gospel is to be dated only around that time. (To infer such knowledge from Tacitus' later mention of Christ in his famous *Annals* passage would be a less than secure proposition, as we shall see in the next chapter.)

James Who?

Perhaps it is reasonable to assume that if Josephus did not write "called Christ," he did not include any other identifying phrase for his "Jesus," one that was removed by an interpolator. If he had said anything which clearly precluded that he was referring to Jesus Christ, it seems unlikely that any scribe would have gone so far as to turn it into such a reference, either deliberately or by accident. It is one thing to take advantage of an ambiguity, or a silence; it is another to consciously twist one stated fact into a quite different one. In the presence of a definite identifier for "Jesus," there would have been no scope for a scribe to understand "James" as referring to the Christian James the Just. But if he *was* given such scope, why did Josephus provide no identification for his "Jesus"? One explanation is that he was about to, as "son of Damneus." Or, if the entire

phrase "brother of Jesus, called Christ" constituted the Christian addition, we can reasonably assume that Josephus either did not know anything about this James except that Ananus had executed him, or felt it was not necessary to enlarge on him further.

In either case, if we can seriously call into question the feasibility of Josephus writing "called Christ"—which we are about to do—there are no grounds for assuming that Josephus was referring to the Christian James. And in the absence of anything more than "the brother of Jesus," the virtually certain scenario would be that he was *not* referring to the Christian James, since Josephus would hardly have overlooked the fact that the reader would have had no way of knowing the "Jesus" he was referring to, and thus could not identify the obscure Christian James in that way.

In any case, the context is about Jewish figures and their Roman overseers on the Jerusalem political scene in the years leading up to the War. It is difficult to believe that the Christian James would have been involved in such circles—and Josephus nowhere else presents him in that way (or any other way). Assuming that a Jerusalem church even existed at this time, the head of it would have been a sectarian outsider, unlikely to be involved in the religious establishment (much less be granted the right to wear priestly robes and enter the Holy of Holies, as alleged by Hegesippus). Thus, if Josephus *were* referring to James the Just, he would surely have felt he ought to say something more explanatory about this James who moved beyond the fringes of the Jewish establishment, something by way of explanation as to who he was and why Ananus had been out to get him.

Moreover, he would especially need to explain why other influential Jews had been so incensed by his murder. If we can judge by Paul, the new Christians were *personae non gratae*, subject to persecution. The High Priest's murder of their leader in Jerusalem, for whatever reason, would more likely have been regarded with some approval, or at least not with such effrontery that offended citizens would successfully agitate to have the High Priest deposed. And an effrontery merely on the basis of a supposed abuse of power by Ananus, which some suggest was the reason, should have been diluted—even neutralized—by the despised sectarian status of the victim. Yet Josephus, who is elsewhere very much a detail man, provides no explanation for what would have been a very odd situation. It would have been an oddity even in the context of an assumed authenticity for the entire "brother of Jesus called Christ" and constitutes a good argument against that assumption.

On this point, further questions need raising. If we presume that Josephus' James was the Christian James and was so renowned for his 'justice,' meaning a righteousness in faithful observance of the Jewish Law, on what basis would Ananus have accused him of violating that Law? One would assume—as did later Christian embellishers of this presumption—that it could only be on the basis of some aspect of being a Christian. We know from Paul that believers in the Christ were persecuted from early on, which must have involved a perception that they were *not* faithful observers of the Jewish Law. Why then would other—

non-Christian—citizens, themselves no doubt "strict in observance of the Law," come to James' defense and go so far as to bring about Ananus' dismissal?

Rather, the implication is that affronted citizens are incensed at the murder of one of their own—which James the Just would not have been—someone who in their view was not only wrongfully accused but tried and executed in a manner that contravened the rules of the Roman occupation. (The latter was probably a convenient excuse to complain to the governor about Ananus' actions.) And note that Josephus here does not lay any emphasis on the character of his "James," certainly not as a paragon of virtue and faithful observance; that comes later from Christian writers who are commenting on their own James the Just and reading him into Josephus. There are just too many anomalies in this situation to allow us to cavalierly assume that this James is to be equated with the Christian James the Just.

And there is yet one more. It is not only James who has been tried and executed, but "together with some others." Although not clearly stated, it would seem that those others are associates of James; one would think at least that they were all accused of the same thing. (Otherwise, we would seem to have a High Priest consumed with blood lust rounding up random citizens for execution.) But if James is the Christian James the Just, then those "others" are almost certainly Christians. Josephus would then be telling us of a significant pogrom against the Church in Jerusalem instigated by the High Priest no less and opposed by Jewish citizens, something that is not in the slightest witnessed to in Christian tradition or anywhere else. Even those traditions relating to the death of James the Just, as we shall see, do not square with the situation outlined in *Antiquities* 20.

If, on the other hand, a different James and some like-minded others, perhaps political associates, have been targeted by Ananus for political reasons, with this James being the brother of Jesus son of Damneus, the situation makes much better sense. James is identified by his brother rather than by his father because that brother Jesus figures in the story, namely as the successor to the deposed Ananus in the high priesthood, and perhaps in previous ways not stated. The fact that Jesus is given the high priesthood following Ananus' downfall suggests a political subtext of rival Jerusalem factions behind the frustratingly little which Josephus tells us about the situation.

Witness to the *Antiquities* 20 Reference

Before pursuing this line of argument further, we need to take a look at the attestation for the *Antiquities* 20 reference and the traditions about James' death. The considerations just outlined render highly dubious the portrait of James by the itinerant Christian historian Hegesippus around 160, as preserved (his works are lost) in Eusebius' *History of the Church*, II, 23. According to Eusebius, Hegesippus reported that James was permitted to enter the holy sanctuary of the Temple and to wear priestly robes, this despite the fact that he had publicly declared Jesus to be the Savior and converted many Jews, and was even regarded as the object of ancient prophecies, so that "many even of the ruling class

believed." This is Christian legend and idealization a century after the fact, and none of it is remotely reliable. The account of James' martyrdom in the same Hegesippus passage quoted by Eusebius reaches a peak of incredibility, with its picture of the Jewish authorities regretting the liberty they had accorded him to win over so many of the people to Jesus, and begging him to rescind his more extravagant claims before the crowds at Passover by making a speech from the height of the Temple wall. When he, like a Shakespearean Mark Antony, took the occasion to turn the tables on them and 'praise Caesar,' the Scribes and Pharisees threw him down from the parapet and he was stoned and clubbed to death. That speech and the following murder scene is heavily reminiscent of the Stephen martyrdom in the Acts of the Apostles, the latter account and even the character of Stephen himself being dubiously historical. Either Hegesippus is modeling himself on an Acts which he had come to know when he visited Rome in the mid 2nd century, not long after that document had been concocted, or he is reflecting a legend of James the Just on which the Stephen scene in Acts was also modeled, neither one enjoying any reliable claim to history.

In any case, the account in Hegesippus can in no way be reconciled with the one in *Antiquities* 20. Not only is the High Priest Ananus not involved in the former, there is no formal charge and execution; James' death is an impromptu act. In *Antiquities* 20 there is no scene at the Temple. Scholars have suggested that the Hegesippus version is a legendary accretion on the basics in Josephus, while Eddy and Boyd (*op.cit.*, p.189) take this marked divergence between Josephus and Christian tradition as "suggesting] that (the Josephan) passage is not a Christian interpolation." But a more likely resolution of the problem is that the account in Josephus has nothing to do with the Christian James the Just, but was turned into such a thing by an interpolator, or through a marginal gloss which did not take into account the contradictions involved. In what survives of Hegesippus, he makes no mention of Josephus or what was contained in him.

A Curiosity in Jerome

But someone else does. By the time we get to Jerome in the late 4th century, the 'record' of the death of James has become positively anarchic. In chapter 2 of his *De Viris Illustribus* (*Illustrious Men*), Jerome witnesses to a mix of Josephus, *Antiquities* 20 and the legends of Hegesippus. After recounting the above-mentioned dubious Hegesippian portrait of James, Jerome declares:

Josephus also in the 20th book of his *Antiquities*.. ,mention(s) that on the death of Festus who reigned over Judea, Albinus was sent by Nero as his successor. Before he had reached his province, Ananus the high priest...assembled a council and publicly tried to force James to deny that Christ is the son of God. When he refused Ananus ordered him to be stoned. Cast down from a pinnacle of the temple, his legs broken, but still half alive, raising his hands to heaven he said, "Lord forgive them for they know not what they do." Then struck on the head by the club of a fuller such a club as fullers are accustomed to wring out garments with—he died.

Is Jerome saying here that his copy of *Antiquities* 20 contained all this information? (It was derived, in great part, from the same Hegesippus passage quoted by Eusebius, as well as from preceding comments by Eusebius which may have been derived from elsewhere in Hegesippus.) Is he saying that it was inserted into the midst of Josephus' original passage on Ananus and the death of "James and some others"? It would seem so, for he immediately goes on:

This same Josephus records the tradition that this James was of so great sanctity and reputation among the people that the downfall of Jerusalem was believed to be on account of his death.

This is another witness to the so-called "lost reference" which we are about to discuss, although the implication by Jerome is that it was not contained in the same *Antiquities* 20 passage. (He does not refer to it as being in the context of the recounted death of James.) But Jerome's description of the *Antiquities* 20 passage makes it seem that he witnesses to a separate line of manuscripts of Josephus which, post-Eusebius, has suffered a more lengthy insertion into *Antiquities* 20, one which not only identified its James with the Christian James the Just, but took material from Hegesippus to recount the circumstances of his trial and death.

Now, Jerome is seemingly paraphrasing and not offering a direct quote. But to think that Josephus could say "tried to force James to deny that Christ is the son of God" or anything like it, or that this could reflect the content of some original version by Josephus which did not survive into our extant copies, would be irresponsible. (Note that Jerome does not mention the "brother of Jesus, called Christ" phrase in his discussion. Perhaps it was there, or the first half of it, but not quoted in his paraphrase, or the manuscript line which the interpolator was doctoring did not contain all or part of it.)

James and the Fall of Jerusalem

The implication in the last line of Eusebius' quote of Hegesippus is that this murder of James led directly to the War: "Immediately after this Vespasian began to besiege them." In point of fact, there was an interim of several years, if the death of James is to be attributed to the year 62, although this may well have been based on nothing other than the traditional reading of the Josephan passage with its chronological markers; we certainly know of no other basis. Hegesippus, as quoted by Eusebius, provides no historical signposts for dating the event other than that final line. This, however, is not to be trusted as a disinterested statement. Eusebius' own comments immediately afterward indicate that there was a longstanding view held by Christians that the Jews of Josephus' time

felt that this was why his [James'] martyrdom was immediately followed by the siege of Jerusalem, which happened to them for no other reason than the wicked crime of which he had been the victim. [*H.E.* II, 23.19]

Hegesippus, apparently anxious to present this same connection (he is the first recorded Christian writer to do so), seems to have telescoped the years between

the death of James and the event of the War in which Jerusalem was destroyed Eusebius, to clinch this view, declares following the quote above that even Josephus, the Jewish historian, was of the same mind and proceeds to quote him:

And indeed Josephus did not hesitate to write this down in so many words: "These things happened to avenge James the Just, who was a brother of Jesus, called Christ, for the Jews slew him, although he was a most just man."

It is a source of frustration that Eusebius does not identify the location of this quote—referred to colloquially as the "lost reference"—for it is not to be found in any extant work of Josephus. But he is not the first to present it in this manner, for Origen had earlier said the same thing, indirectly referring to Josephus' words in three different passages, similarly without identifying the location:

Commentary on Matthew 10:17 - And to so great a reputation among the people for righteousness did this James rise, that Flavius Josephus, who wrote the *Antiquities of the Jews* in twenty books, when wishing to exhibit the cause why the people suffered so great misfortunes that even the temple was razed to the ground, said that these things happened to them in accordance with the wrath of God in consequence of the things which they had dared to do against James **the brother of Jesus called Christ** [*ton adelphon Iesou tou legomenou Christou*]. And the wonderful thing is, that, though he did not accept Jesus as Christ, he yet gave testimony that the righteousness of James was so great, and he says that the people thought that they had suffered these things because of James.

Contra Celsum I, 47: Now this writer [Josephus], although not believing in Jesus as the Christ, in seeking after the cause of the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple... says... that these disasters happened to the Jews as a punishment for the death of James the Just, who was a **brother of Jesus called Christ** [*adelphos Iesou tou legomenou Christou*], the Jews having put him to death, although he was a man most distinguished for his justice.

Contra Celsum II, 13: ...Vespasian, whose son Titus destroyed Jerusalem, on account, as Josephus says, of James the Just, **the brother of Jesus called Christ** [*ton adelphon Iesou tou legomenou Christou*].. ²²⁴

In the latter two passages, Origen goes on to provide the qualification that Josephus should have said, not that it was on account of the murder of James, but rather on account of the execution of Jesus, the Son of God. (He lays out his argument for this view in *Contra Celsum* IV, 22.) Eusebius does not echo that qualification here, though the revised view was well established by his own time and he in fact puts it forward elsewhere (as in *H.E.* II, 5 and 6). The earliest Christian record of this revised view is found in Melito of Sardis in the latter 2nd century, followed by Tertullian (*Answer to the Jews*, 13) and Hippolytus in the early 3rd century, and finally in Origen toward the middle of the 3rd century, although as we have seen he was also concerned to amend the older view which he had apparently encountered in a manuscript of Josephus.

Scholars have wondered whether Eusebius in *H.E.* 23.20 was quoting from a manuscript of Josephus, or whether he was taking the thought from the words of Origen and converting them into a direct quote, perhaps not knowing where they were supposed to be found, since Origen had not specified their location. (In the *Commentary on Matthew* passage Origen seems to imply that they are to be found in *Antiquities*, though some have suggested *Jewish War*.) Indeed, the key phrase of twelve Greek words which in Eusebius is presented as a direct quote is identical to the phrase presented by Origen in *Contra Celsum* I, 47 as an indirect quote, making it very possible Eusebius was simply drawing on Origen.

So far, we have seen an allusion to James' death in Hegesippus in the mid 2nd century as the cause of the War, although with no mention of any account by Josephus (at least in what Eusebius has preserved). In the first half of the 3rd century, Origen three times makes direct reference to James' murder and specifies that Josephus had somewhere said that on account of this act God punished the Jews by the destruction of Jerusalem. As one can note, in all three references Origen uses a phrase similar to the *Antiquities* 20 line, referring to James as "brother of Jesus, called Christ," although he is not presenting this as a direct quote, much less associating it in any way we could identify with the extant *Antiquities* 20 passage. Another century later, as noted, Eusebius "quotes" Josephus in *History of the Church* II, 23, 20, which we can repeat here:

And indeed Josephus has not hesitated to testify this in his writings, where he says: "These things happened to the Jews to avenge James the Just, who was **brother of Jesus, called Christ** [*adelphos Iesou tou legomenou Christou*]. For the Jews slew him, although he was a most just man."

Thus far, all references to the phrase in bold have appeared in the context of an unknown passage of Josephus, identified as such by those two Christian writers. That alleged passage seems to have been devoted specifically to the idea that the death of James was the reason for the destruction of Jerusalem. There is no suggestion by either writer that this reference appeared in any context relating to that which we find in the extant *Antiquities* 20, namely the death of a certain James at the hands of Ananus and his removal from the High Priest position. Nor in the latter passage is there any description of its James as a particularly just man, nor any mention of anyone believing that the death of James was the cause of the fall of Jerusalem. Eusebius, in fact, right after supposedly quoting Josephus on this matter, goes on to say: "And the same writer [Josephus] also records his [James'] death in *Antiquities* Book 20," clearly implying that in his mind the two passages were distinct, two separate accounts.

At this, Eusebius proceeds to quote the *Antiquities* 20 passage on Ananus, with its James and Jesus reference, more or less as it survives in extant texts.

The fact that Eusebius identifies the location of the latter but not the former is further indication that he is relying on Origen and did not know what location Origen was drawing on. In that case, his assumption that the extant *Antiquities* 20 passage was distinct from it would have been just that, an assumption, but it would certainly have been justified since he gives us nothing like Origen's words

in his quote of the *Antiquities* 20 passage. There have even been suggestions that Origen himself did not know the location and was repeating a kind of 'patristic rumor.' Another suggestion is that Origen was confusing Hegesippus with Josephus. Hegesippus, in his preserved fragments, nowhere states that *Josephus* regarded the destruction of Jerusalem as God's punishment for James' murder. But it is possible that Hegesippus had said it somewhere, that Origen had read it and either relied on it as being true, or mistakenly remembered it as coming from a Josephan text. Such mistakes were not uncommon, due to the difficulty of consulting long manuscripts with nothing like modern indexes.

Neither Origen nor Eusebius can be implying a location for the lost reference in *Antiquities* 20. Nothing we have seen indicates that such a thing was ever there. If Origen was referring to an actual Josephan passage, it was somewhere else. We saw above that Jerome also called attention to the lost reference in *De Viris Illustribus* 2, but that he too seemed to be implying it was not in *Antiquities* 20. One might wonder if Jerome was yet another victim of faulty memory in envisioning any such reference. But it is difficult to accept that we would have three different commentators suffering from the same kind of memory disorder, although Jerome could simply have been relying on either Eusebius or Origen for what he says about the death of James as the cause of the fall of Jerusalem.

Whatever its location, we are faced with the striking coincidence that Origen and Eusebius have used precisely the same words to refer to a phrase in an unknown passage of Josephus (real or imagined), a phrase which was identical to the one now found in *Antiquities* 20: "the brother of Jesus, called Christ." Either Josephus had described Jesus the same way in two separate places, or the lost reference to the James-Jerusalem connection is a Christian interpolation which uses the identical phrase to describe Jesus as is found in an allegedly authentic reference to Jesus in *Antiquities* 20.

Digression: Did Josephus Write the Lost Reference?

Before we can draw any conclusion from this, one point must be established. If we assume the presence of the lost reference somewhere in Josephus, could this statement about the reason for the fall of Jerusalem have been authentic to Josephus, or was it necessarily a Christian insertion? If we consider Josephus the author, he would have been giving either his personal opinion or a current Jewish opinion; both have been asserted by various scholars. But there are problems with either alternative.

We must first ask, why would any Jew have adopted such a view? If James was a prominent *Christian* leader and brother of a supposed subversive who had been crucified as a rebel and heretic, why would non-Christian Jews give him such an honor as to believe that God had wreaked upon them the greatest calamity in Jewish history simply because of his murder? Moreover, this would imply that Christianity, and by extension Jesus' own status, *was supported by God*. Would Jews have believed such a thing? Hardly.

Would Josephus himself have subscribed to such a view? He would no more accept the implications just stated than would Jews in general. Moreover, the

blanket phrase "the Jews slew him" is too uncompromising. As noted earlier, it would contradict Josephus' own account in *Antiquities* 20 with its very limited responsibility for the death of James. He would hardly have envisioned God punishing the entire Jewish nation for a murder he himself portrays as the action of an upstart high priest, a man whom other Jews promptly condemned and caused to be removed. Moreover, had Josephus subscribed to such a tradition as is found in the lost reference, he would surely have provided his readers with a fuller, more laudatory account of the "one named James" over whose death God had destroyed the Jewish state and leveled his own holy Temple to the ground."²⁵

With this conclusion, we can strengthen the case that the lost reference could never have been part of *Antiquities* 20 even as an interpolation. Not only would it have fatally interrupted the narrative regarding Ananus, the passage presents the murder of James as the work of this overbearing high priest, at once denounced by leading Jewish citizens and resulting in a punishment meted out to the one responsible. Surely even the most dim-witted scribe could hardly have made Josephus turn around and declare in the same breath that "the Jews had slain" James the Just and thereby brought upon themselves such a horrific consequence as the destruction of Jerusalem and the very Temple itself.

We must conclude that the lost reference, with its view that God punished the Jews for the murder of James the Just, is a Christian product and an interpolation into a manuscript of Josephus at an unknown location, to be seen by Origen and possibly Eusebius and Jerome as well.

Testimony to *Antiquities* 20

If the lost reference was clearly a Christian interpolation, how does this direct us toward deciding on the authenticity of the reference to Jesus "called Christ" in *Antiquities* 20? Did the interpolator of the lost reference borrow an authentic phrase from Josephus in the latter passage, or are they both interpolations?

We can start with an observation which seems to have been universally ignored, and is the punch line I have been working toward under the topic of the "witness" to the second Jesus passage in Josephus. In discussion and debate, those references to the lost James-Jerusalem connection tend to get lumped with the *Antiquities* 20 passage because of the commonality of the "brother of Jesus, called Christ" phrase. But this turns a blind eye to the fact that those other references are *in no way supportive of the Antiquities 20 passage*. They do not constitute a witness to it. The commonality of the phrase does not give us such a thing, since they are two independent passages constituting different ideas, and there are other explanations available for that commonality.

So when do we first come upon some witness in Christian literature to the actual "Jesus called Christ" reference in *Antiquities* 20? That witness is not in Origen, for his comments on "the brother of Jesus, called Christ" relate exclusively to the lost reference on the James-Jerusalem connection. Rather, this phrase as identified with *Antiquities* 20 and the account of Ananus is first found in Eusebius' *History of the Church*. Immediately after Eusebius has parroted Origen in claiming that Josephus held the view that the destruction of Jerusalem

was due to the murder of James, he goes on to quote the entire passage on Ananus as it stands today, identifying its location in *Antiquities* 20. It serves to provide the reader with "another recounting" of the death of James.

Eusebius himself is thus the earliest witness we have to an Antiquities 20 passage containing "the brother of Jesus, called Christ. "

No earlier knowledge of the passage as it now stands can be identified. Origen's mentions of the lost reference throw no necessary light on *Antiquities* 20. In fact, his silence on the latter is telling. Since he has three times taken note of the lost reference (even if in the unlikely event that he only misremembered it), one could have expected him to mention, as Eusebius would later do, the *Antiquities* 20 reference as well, at least somewhere along the line, one passage reminding him of the other. He does not. Nor does anyone else before Eusebius.

We thus find ourselves in the same situation as in regard to the *Testimonium*. We have no witness to the present content of the *Antiquities* 20 passage before Eusebius. This silence may not be as striking as the silence on the *Testimonium*, but it is nevertheless there. We saw good reason to consider the possibility that Eusebius was the inventor of the *Testimonium*. If, relying on Origen, Eusebius believed that Josephus somewhere had linked the death of James to the destruction of Jerusalem, it could well have occurred to him that the *Antiquities* 20 passage about Ananus' execution of "James by name" ought to be made clearer as another Josephan reference to the death of the Christian James; for he would no doubt have assumed that this figure was indeed James the Just, especially if Josephus had included "brother of Jesus" as a descriptive of his James. The insertion of a few words to accomplish this would have been simple.

We would thus be left with no coincidence to be explained in the similar wording of two different passages. Eusebius would merely have reproduced the language he was familiar with from Origen (or from the actual interpolation of the lost reference if he read it in a manuscript of Josephus) and used it in his insertion in the *Antiquities* 20 passage.

Eusebian authorship of the *Antiquities* 20 reference is one option among several, from the innocent insertion of a marginal gloss to deliberate doctoring of the passage by someone earlier than himself, someone who may have been inspired by Origen or by the earlier interpolator of the lost reference. It is not likely to have been the same scribe responsible for the lost reference, making the two insertions at the same time, since in that case we should have expected Origen to note both of them. In presenting further arguments against Josephan authenticity, no particular one of these options need be adopted *a priori*.

Messiah Who?

This point was examined earlier in regard to the *Testimonium*. Josephus nowhere uses the term "Christ" (*Christos*) except in the two Jesus passages. If we have good reason to think that he would have avoided referring to the Messiah in regard to the *Testimonium*, there is no less reason to think that he would have avoided it in the Ananus passage. Its appearance in the latter, being

so cursory, would in principle suggest that he had previously explained the term to his readers. But if its presence in the *Testimonium* is dubious, this renders its occurrence in *Antiquities* 20 even more suspicious. Even were we to consider the suggestion that he could have had a less committal reference in the earlier book, something such as "he was believed to be the Messiah," this still leaves the *Antiquities* 20 reference—indeed, them both—hanging out to dry, for neither one constitutes an explanation for gentile readers as to what exactly the Messiah was and why this figure of Jesus was so regarded. If Josephus were merely looking for some quick way to identify this Jesus for his readers, one of many by that name in his chronicle, he would have had a much easier and less charged way to do so, less problematic for himself. He would simply have had to say, "the one who was crucified by Pilate." This is a point which it is claimed *did* appear in the original passage of *Antiquities* 18, one that would have been easily remembered by the reader. If Josephus had written the "authentic" *Testimonium*, with no reference to the Messiah, the point about Pilate would have been the inevitable choice to identify Jesus in *Antiquities* 20.

On the other hand, if the phrase in *Antiquities* 20 is a Christian interpolation, there would have been no concern in the interpolator's mind about a missing explanation, since his Christian readers, for whom he was doctoring the text, would have fully understood. They would also have understood the reason for James' death, something the passage also fails to tell the reader.

There is another overriding factor not mentioned earlier which should clearly have precluded Josephus from attaching the term Messiah in any way to the figure of Jesus, here or in the *Testimonium*. We know from *Jewish War* (VI, 5, 4 / 6.312-13) that Josephus regarded and pronounced the Jewish prophecy about a coming national ruler as having been fulfilled in the person of Vespasian. Any association of this prophecy with another figure would have jarred with such a pronouncement. If that pronouncement had been "He was the Messiah," this would have constituted a direct contradiction between *Jewish War* and the *Testimonium*, something whoever was responsible for the *Testimonium* as it stands failed to recognize (as did 13 centuries of Christian readers). But even if the association were an uncommitted one, such as "he was believed to be the Messiah," Josephus might well have reason to think that there was still a danger of confusion in the reader's mind. That is certainly the case when one turns to *Antiquities* 20, for the bare words "called Messiah" would have been anything but a precise indication that Josephus did not himself accept the designation, much less something that would be guaranteed to be seen as derogatory or dismissive. In fact, the words "called Messiah" could feasibly be taken as a tacit acknowledgement, ruling out Vespasian. Thus it seems virtually impossible that Josephus would have risked introducing the statement at all, in either passage, at least without some clear specification that he did not, could not, and that Jews never would, regard Jesus as the Messiah. Or, in the case of *Antiquities* 20, to specify who it was that "called" him such, since it was not the great bulk of his fellow countrymen, and Christians were not at all referred to in that passage.

When Josephus wrote *Jewish War* and declared Vespasian the object of that Jewish prophecy, he avoided the term Messiah even then. He also avoided noting that a prominent figure in the recent past had been accorded that honor in a movement which by the 70s was supposedly growing and making an impact; he apparently felt no need to discredit previous claimants to the role he was in the act of assigning to Vespasian. None of this suggests that Josephus would have been disposed to take up the subject in regard to Jesus in either *Antiquities* 18 or 20. In fact, since neither reference served any constructive purpose as far as their contexts were concerned, we should be surprised that he would choose to deal with the subject of Jesus at all.

Ofcourse, all the evidence would indicate that he did not.

A Christian Phrase

The phrase itself, *tou legomenou Christou*, "called Christ," is suspicious. It is essentially identical to the one which concludes Matthew 1:16: *ho legomenos Christos*. The same phrase appears in John 4:25, and here we get the impression that the term itself may have been taken over by Christians from traditional parlance. The Samaritan woman at the well says to Jesus: "I know that Messiah [*Messias*] is coming, he who is called Christ [*ho legomenos Christos*]; when he comes, he will explain everything to us." Here the phrase "he who is called Christ" is redundant, since the Messiah has already been referred to. (And a Samaritan woman, presumably Aramaic-speaking, would only have had a single word to use for both references; "*Christos*" is entirely Greek.) Its insertion by John suggests that the phrase had some currency in his circles, leading him to include it in his artificial dialogue.

Curiously, the phrase is also placed by Matthew in the mouth of Pilate (27:17 and 22): "Whom do you want me to release to you: Barabbas or Jesus, called Christ?"—even though his source, Mark, had Pilate refer instead to Jesus as "the king of the Jews," and even though it is unlikely Pilate would have chosen to use such a designation. It would seem that the phrase had a special appeal to the author of Matthew. All these appearances in early Christian writings identify the phrase as one in use by Christians. Thus it could have been a natural choice by a Christian copyist inserting a phrase into Josephus, especially under the influence of its appearance in Matthew, the most popular Gospel from the mid-2nd century on. It is also at this time that another occurrence of it appears in Justin (*Apology* 30): "...the one called Christ among us (*ton par' hemin legomenon Christon*)." It would seem to have been a thoroughly common Christian phrase.

The frequent translation of "*tou legomenou Christou*" as "the so-called Christ," with its skeptical and derogatory overtone, is in no way necessary, and is in fact belied by the usage of the phrase in those Christian writings just looked at, where it obviously cannot have such a connotation. The word *legomenos* is found in many other passages in the New Testament without any implied derogation. Those using the term in their translations of Josephus betray a preconceived bias in favor of his authorship.

Would a Christian be willing to interpolate "*brother* of Jesus" in view of the established concept of Jesus' virgin birth by the latter 2nd century? But James had been called a "brother" in the sense of sibling from early on, right from the Gospel of Mark (even Paul's "brother of the Lord" was reinterpreted that way), and it was left to later generations to rationalize this as best they could. An interpolator would be unlikely to feel any qualm about continuing that tradition. The standard phrase in his time may have been "brother of the *Lord*," but this could hardly be maintained in an insertion into *Antiquities* 20, making Josephus say "the brother of the Lord, called Christ." Although, as noted earlier by Frank Zindler, "the brother of the Lord" seems to have existed in Photius' copy, but with no second phrase attached.²²⁶

Thus we are led by many pathways to the conclusion that in the famous "brother of Jesus, called Christ," at least the second part, and possibly the whole of the phrase, was not the product of Josephus.

Addenda

Before we leave Josephus, two additional points are in order. First, we can consider another minor reference not previously noted. In the *De Viris Illustribus* of Jerome, which in chapter 2 referred to the "tradition" that the death of James led to the destruction of Jerusalem, a second reference to this connection appears in chapter 13:

In the eighteenth book of his *Antiquities* he most openly acknowledges that Christ was slain by the Pharisees on account of the greatness of his miracles, that John the Baptist was truly a prophet, and that Jerusalem was destroyed because of the murder of James the apostle.

Jerome's references to Jesus and John the Baptist undoubtedly represent the two extant passages on those figures in *Antiquities* 18, but what of his reference to the murder of James and the destruction of Jerusalem? Does this indicate that the lost reference was also in *Antiquities* 18? It is not clear where it would have fitted into that book or why an interpolator would have chosen it. Has Jerome somehow 'deduced' this from what Origen and Eusebius have said about it? Is he working from faulty memory? Perhaps all we can say is that Jerome provides us with yet another witness to the chaos of opinion about what Josephus had said and where he had said it—and to the chaos of Christian doctoring of just about anything they could lay their hands on. (If nothing else, we might take Jerome's remark as additional indication that the reference to James and Jerusalem was never part of *Antiquities* 20.)

Second, Origen brings up the lost reference to criticize Josephus for not saying that it was because of the death of Jesus, rather than of James, that God visited upon the Jews the destruction of Jerusalem. But more than half a century later than Josephus the Christian Hegesippus, as we have seen, apparently witnessed to the same thing. As preserved in Eusebius, he intimates a Christian view of his time (mid-2nd century) that it was indeed the death of James the Just which had prompted God's punishment on the Jews.

Now, if Josephus *had* provided witness to a Jewish tradition that the murder of James had resulted in the fall of Jerusalem, why would Christians have subsequently taken over such a view, or formulate it themselves if they did not derive it from the Jews? Why did Hegesippus and his contemporary Christians, and even earlier, *not* impute the calamity to God's punishment for the death of Jesus instead of James, since to subsequent writers such as Origen this seemed obvious?

The explanation is simple. The need to interpret the destruction of Jerusalem would have developed early, no doubt well before Hegesippus. At such a time, *an historical Jesus and historical crucifixion had not yet been invented*, or at least would not yet have been widely disseminated under the influence of an evolving understanding of the Gospels. Thus the idea that the destruction of Jerusalem was a consequence of the execution of Jesus would not yet have arisen in the broader Christian world. Instead, James the Just, head of a prominent sect in Jerusalem which believed in a spiritual Christ—supposedly murdered by the Jewish high priest just before the War, according to Christian interpretation of the reference to "James" in *Antiquities* 20—would have been the natural, and perhaps only candidate available. And although the idea of an historical Jesus was well under way by Hegesippus' time, the force of the original tradition about James' death might still have been operating, to be supplanted by the concept of Jesus' role only subsequently. It is not long after Hegesippus that we see the changeover, beginning with Melito of Sardis around 170.

This implies that the lost reference was inserted into manuscripts of Josephus at an early period, probably not beyond the middle of the 2nd century. Any later than that, and the interpolator could be expected to reflect Origen's view—that the fall of Jerusalem was due to the death of Jesus, not of James.

Why was the "lost reference" lost? Some suggest it may have been removed because of Origen's complaint, but in that case it is much more likely that it would have been *changed* to reflect that complaint. That is, we would find the reference saying that it was on account of the death of Jesus, rather than of James, that Jerusalem fell. However, the better explanation would be that the "lost reference," being an interpolation, was made only in certain manuscript lines (perhaps only one), possibly of *Jewish War* and probably in the east, and that these lines died out. Once the reference's imitation (if that's what it was) became interpolated into *Antiquities* 20, it would have undergone its own fate, in this case surviving and spreading westward into all copies of the latter document. If that second interpolation was Eusebius' product, he would have been in the best position to ensure its propagation.

In view of all the arguments against the likelihood of authenticity for the reference in *Antiquities* 20, the reliability of this second pillar of the Josephan witness to Jesus collapses along with the first.

A Roman Trio: Tacitus, Suetonius, Pliny

I: Tacitus

Josephus may constitute the most popular appeal in support of the existence of an historical Jesus, but the uncertainties surrounding his references reduce him to an obscured beacon in a foggy sea. In the view of most scholars, on the other hand, a true lifeline has been thrown from the hand of the Roman historian Tacitus, who supplies us with the first pagan reference to Jesus in the second decade of the 2nd century. According to Paul Eddy and Gregory Boyd (*The Jesus Legend*, p.184) "Tacitus' report provides solid, independent, non-Christian evidence for the life and death of Jesus." But does it?

Since the date of the publication of Tacitus' *Annals* is usually pegged at 116, this reference to Jesus comes a quarter-century after Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews*, and thus is already perilously late. It comes at a time when probably two Gospels, perhaps even a third, have been written, a time following the first witness in Ignatius—who supposedly ended up in Rome itself to be martyred—that Jesus was regarded in some Christian circles as a man put to death by Pontius Pilate. Thus, to place any confidence in Tacitus as presenting actual historical information, instead of merely Christian tradition in the community of Rome in his time, would require some fairly secure evidence of such within the passage, unencumbered by the sort of difficulties we have seen which beset the references in Josephus. We would also need to be free of any troubling doubts that the Tacitean passage is authentic. On neither of these counts are the required criteria safely met.

The passage in *Annals* 15:44 follows a brilliantly crafted and colorful account of the Great Fire in Rome in July of 64 CE. In the interests of future observations to be made, I will quote a few selected passages preceding chapter 44 with its reference to Christ and the Christians. The key part of the latter is in bold.

A disaster followed, whether accidental or treacherously contrived by the emperor is uncertain, as authors have given both accounts, worse, however, and more dreadful than any which have ever happened to this city by the violence of fire... And no one dared to stop the mischief, because of incessant menaces from a number of persons who forbade the extinguishing of the flames, because again others openly hurled brands, and kept shouting that there was one who gave them authority, either seeking to plunder more freely, or obeying orders.

Nero at this time was at Antium, and did not return to Rome until the fire approached his house, which he had built to connect the palace with the gardens of Maecenas. It could not, however, be stopped from devouring the palace, the house, and everything around it. However, to relieve the people, driven out homeless as they were, he threw open to them the Campus Martius and the public buildings of Agrippa, and even his own gardens, and raised temporary structures to receive the destitute multitude...These acts, though popular, produced no effect, since a rumor had gone forth everywhere that, at the very time when the city was in flames, the emperor appeared on a private stage and sang of the destruction of Troy, comparing present misfortunes with the calamities of antiquity...

[An account follows of Nero's measures after the fire to restore the city]...But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the propitiations of the gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order. **Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians [or Chrestians] by the populace; Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of the procurator Pontius Pilate, and a most pernicious superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular.** Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as nightly illumination when daylight had expired.

Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle, and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or stood aloft on a car. Hence, even for criminals who deserved extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty, that they were being destroyed.

In regard to the direct references to Christ and the Christians, an analysis of their reliability as a pointer to the existence of Jesus falls under two headings. What was the source of Tacitus information? And, are those elements of the passage in fact authentic to him? The two categories, of course, are mutually exclusive. Basically, either Tacitus wrote the passage but the nature of his source may guarantee no historical veracity, or he did not and it presents nothing more than Christians interpolating their own view of history into a pagan author. We need not commit to a choice, and their mutual exclusivity casts no aspersions on the argument. It means merely that the negative side is able to cover both bases.

1. The Question of Sources

Tacitus as an Historian

Since Tacitus does not specify the source of his Christian information, the first of our two categories revolves around his practices and reliability as an historian. Modern historians generally praise him for his qualities, pronouncing him one of the most professional and dependable of a very uneven ancient lot. Although, one must note that a century or so ago he tended to receive less praise from commentators. The famous mythicist Arthur Drews (*The Witnesses to the Historicity of Jesus*, published 1912) notes the degree of skepticism which some historians of his day brought to Tacitus, and he includes (p.23) this quote from Hermann Schiller:

"We are accustomed to hearing Tacitus praised as a model historian, and in many respects it may be true; but it does not apply to criticism of his authorities and his own research, for these were *astonishingly poor* in Tacitus. *He never studied the archives.*"¹²¹

What might we glean from Tacitus' own declarations about his work and methodology? His opening remarks at the start of the *Annals* are certainly commendable, if a bit self-congratulatory: "Hence my purpose is to relate a few facts...without any bitterness or partiality, from any motive to which I am far removed." As did almost all ancient historians—and of course most modern ones—he drew on his predecessors. He frequently refers to those previous historians, sometimes by name, as well as to the "daily register" and the registers of the Senate. He is determined to improve on the history of the emperors. But all this has to do with *Roman* history, and specifically with the imperial careers, all of it for a Roman audience. Would Tacitus have been this concerned and scrupulous in regard to a passing mention of a Jewish religious sect, and would he have had the means to be so?

Archives or Hearsay?

The latter question involves the issue of whether any report of the crucifixion of Jesus would have been sent from Judea (presumably by Pontius Pilate) to Rome and there lodged in an archive, still to be recoverable some eighty years later. The Romans executed thousands upon thousands of people during their history, and it is surely unreasonable to assume that every one of them was scrupulously recorded, with such a record carefully maintained. One would think that the required storage space alone would have been phenomenal. We have no evidence of such extreme a mania for record-keeping, covering one aspect of the administration of an empire which included the lands of the entire Mediterranean basin and beyond. How many hours would Tacitus have been forced to spend searching out the confirmation of a Christian tradition about their reputed founder, and would he have felt that it would have justified the effort? Where exactly would he have looked? Did those archives not only collect and preserve,

but also compile detailed indexes to executed criminals? Would such eight-decades-old records have been readily accessible? Would any particular item of information have been further buried in a long scroll, a report to the Home Office covering several months of administrative accounts by Pilate and his officials, or are we to think that Pilate thought Jesus was important enough to deserve a separate missive back to the emperor, as later Christian forgers of such things naively presumed?

The more we consider the feasibility of Tacitus deriving his information about Jesus from "the archives," the more dubious the idea becomes. He is concerned with Roman history and the correcting of distortions and disinformation he sees as present in previous histories. He would hardly have brought the same kind of concern to the founding tradition of a despised sect from Judea, introduced only incidentally in his account of Nero and the fire. If that sect as it was presently developing in Rome declared that it had begun with the execution of a figure in Jerusalem by Pontius Pilate almost a century ago, why would it have been a pressing matter to verify this? Why would Tacitus have had any reason to doubt it in the first place? If every incidental point included in his *Annals* and in his *Histories* was regarded as requiring checking, especially under the laborious conditions of research and writing which existed in his day, his progress would have been glacial. It is probable that we can safely set aside the fancy that Tacitus' information about Jesus was the result of a careful search of Roman records.

In addressing this issue, Eddy and Boyd confine themselves to the question of whether Tacitus had *access* to whatever archives existed, presenting evidence that, with one exception, he indeed did. This need not be in doubt, and does not address the question of whether he would have *chosen* to make such a search in regard to the claims of a minor and disreputable sect. Eddy and Boyd also examine the other side of this coin. If we were to think that Tacitus was *not* likely to have consulted an archive, was he likely to have relied on hearsay, on what the Christians of his day in Rome were saying about their genesis, either directly from them or through intermediate Roman reporting of their claims? Much of the argument against this by dissenters in general is cast as some sort of question of honor on Tacitus' part, not to break an assumed principle of being a reliable historian. But here this is surely carried to an extreme. Nothing hinges on the accuracy of a founder's crucifixion by Pilate, a tradition which, as noted, neither Tacitus nor his readers would have had any reason to think twice about, let alone classify as some dreaded form of 'hearsay,' dishonorable to accept without careful confirmation.

But let's examine a passage in Book 4 of the *Annals* to get a sense of what rumor and hearsay mean to the historian. Here, Tacitus is recounting the murder of Drusus, son of the emperor Tiberius, by slow poisoning. The instigator was alleged to be Sejanus, the praetorian prefect who made himself a Iago to Tiberius' Othello, turning him against his family. Sejanus was executed for the crime, but Tacitus adds another element to his account:

In relating the death of Drusus I have followed the narrative of most of the best historians. But I would not pass over a rumor of the time, the strength of which is not even yet exhausted...

This rumor spoke of Sejanus enlisting a eunuch to spike Tiberius' drink at a dinner attended by Drusus, then warning Tiberius ahead of time not to drink the cup handed to him, as it would be poisoned by Drusus to kill his father. At the meal, Tiberius, acting on Sejanus' warning, takes the cup given to him and hands it to his son to drink. Drusus promptly does so and dies. Says Tacitus, "These popular rumors, over and above the fact that they are not vouched for by any good writer, may be instantly refuted." And he goes on to do just that, then summing up:

My object in mentioning and refuting this story is, by a conspicuous example, to put down hearsay, and to request all into whose hands my work shall come, not to catch eagerly at wild and improbable rumors in preference to genuine history which has not been perverted into romance.

One can immediately see the nature of Tacitus' concern, which is not to allow an unsubstantiated rumor attached to the famous event of the poisoning of Drusus, a rumor he regards as inherently ridiculous, to go undisputed. This is an historical incident in Rome's lurid past which is of intense interest to his readers and he does not want them led astray any longer by the unlikelihood of this part of it. How he discredits it, moreover, is by subjecting the facts of the case to rational scrutiny and applying them to the rumor, not by any further check of sources or archives. We can also immediately see the difference between this sort of thing and the Christian opinion that their founder had been crucified by Pontius Pilate. Such an event had nothing to do with Roman history, or with his readers' interests. Tacitus had no reason to suspect it of inaccuracy, much less to regard it as "wild and improbable" (why, he would think, would the Christians have made up such a thing?), and thus he had no fear that his readers would be misled. The Christians were a disdained group at the time, as were the Jews out of which they were seen to have grown. Both Tacitus and his readership would no doubt have been well disposed to accept that their founder was a crucified criminal, undergoing an ignominious death at the hands of a Roman governor.

We might also note that Tacitus often offers wild and salacious details about characters in his accounts: as one poster on the IIDB put it, "things that he says happened 'in secret,' including discreet sexual liaisons, private room plottings, and games of anonymity." Were these rumors and hearsay—he certainly does not cite any reputable sources for them, let alone previous historians—carefully confirmed? Moreover, soon after the Christ passage, Tacitus recounts popular talk about "prodigies presaging impending evils," including a comet, "human and other births with two heads," and a "calf born with its head attached to its leg." Were all of these phenomena checked to confirm their authenticity? There was obviously a selective and subjective element in how Tacitus treated his various topics and people. And it is the rare historian who can be free of self-

serving methods when the subject matter concerns his or her own heritage. The Christian historian Eusebius has been shown to be good proof of that.

Christ vs. Jesus

Other aspects of this question invite examination. If Tacitus had consulted an archive and found there a report about the crucifixion, it would hardly have failed to contain the name "Jesus." Yet in 15:44 he offers only the term "Christ," treating it as though it were the man's name.

Christus, from whom the name [i.e., of the '*Christianos*—or rather of the '*Chrestianos*'—just referred to] had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty...

The standard rejoinder, as exemplified by Eddy and Boyd (*op.cit.*, p. 182-3), is that "Tacitus only mentions 'Christ' in order to explain the origin of the term 'Christians.' A reference to 'Jesus' at this point would not have explained the term 'Christian' and thus would have been completely beside the point."

Yes, it would have been beside the point in regard to explaining the origin of the name (a point which is only subsidiary), but it would hardly have been beside the point in regard to the sentence as a whole. In fact, without it, the principal point of his statement is undeniably misleading. It implies, "A man named Christ was executed by Pontius Pilate," which is something he would hardly have said or risked implying if he had read an archived report, one that would certainly have given the man's personal name. To avoid this, Tacitus—"careful historian that he was"—should have given the man's name to make his main point, but as well mentioned the title "Christ" in order to explain the Christian name.

Robert Van Voorst (*Jesus Outside the New Testament*, p.46) is another who tries to rationalize this mistake: "even if Tacitus did know the name 'Jesus' he presumably would not have used it in this context, because it would have interfered with his explanation of the origin of *Christianoi* in *Christus*, confusing his readers." That 'interference' could easily have been remedied by a mention of both names, which would also have avoided the confusion he ended up creating over the crucified man's personal name.

It is also doubtful that an official report would even have mentioned the term "Christ." But if it did, it would have been by way of explaining who or what this "Jesus" was alleged to have been to his followers, and thus Tacitus would have gained a full understanding of what the term meant and how it would need to be used to be understood. There is nothing to suggest that he had such an insight. The fact that he used the term in this misleading fashion more than suggests that he did not consult an official record.

This implied misunderstanding on Tacitus' part suggests that he was indeed deriving this imperfect knowledge from nothing other than hearsay. It must be kept in mind that the purpose of this chapter was to recount the persecution of some group by Nero after the fire. If the passage is correct that this group was called Christians, a vague knowledge or impression—from the group itself—that it was derived from a figure known as 'Christ' could have led Tacitus to assume that the man's name was "*Christus*" and to use it accordingly.

But there is another consideration which should lead us in that very direction. "*Christus*" was a Latin rendering of the Greek "*Christos*" which itself translated the Hebrew "*Meshiach*" meaning "Anointed," as it traditionally referred to kings and high priests. The latter term also came to be used for the expected Messiah of Jewish myth and for the Jesus-Messiah of the early Christians (whether he was mythical or historical). In the Greek east, the word "*Christos*" had been adopted by Greek speakers to refer to both. It consciously connoted the idea of the term in question being based on the 'anointing' of God's representative, and also as referring to an expected eschatological figure.

As Christianity spread west, Latin-speaking Christians would have converted the Greek "*Christos*" into "*Christus*." Tacitus and anyone else in Rome by his time could certainly have encountered it used among Christians, even if they had mistaken it as a proper name. But in the time of Pontius Pilate and immediately after Jesus' crucifixion, few in Rome would have been familiar with such a term or its connotations. "*Christos*" in Greek had been accorded the 'anointed' and eschatological meanings on its adoption in Hellenistic times; but no such process would yet have taken place in Italy with a Latinized "*Christus*." Even if Pilate and his administration had adopted such a term to deal with the phenomenon they were encountering, it is virtually impossible that they would have chosen to use the term in any report in Latin sent back to Rome, for no one there could be expected to understand its significance. Even if it were suggested that the Latin term "*Christus*," especially in the east, could already have been in existence to refer to the Jews' idea of a Messiah, a usage of it by Pilate to refer to Jesus would be misunderstood by almost anyone in Rome as reporting that the Jewish Messiah had been executed.

Thus it is almost impossible that Tacitus would have encountered the term in an archive, even to misunderstand it. This leads us inevitably to the option of Tacitus deriving it from hearsay and mistaking it as a name. (Alternatively, it could lead us to another option, that the statement containing it is a Christian interpolation.)

It is sometimes argued that had Tacitus been forced to rely solely on hearsay for his account of Christ, he would have given some indication of this, perhaps using the word "*dicunt*"—"they say" or "it is said." Perhaps so, but it is just as arguable that Tacitus, concerned with his reputation, would have been unwilling to make the bald statement that it was merely hearsay, and he was unwilling or unable to confirm it. More than likely, however, he simply accepted it as an established fact. It was hardly in the same category as the legend of Romulus and Remus at the founding of Rome some seven centuries earlier, something which good historians would have had every reason to question for accuracy. If the Christians couldn't get their own origin right, Tacitus may well have thought, when it lay not even a hundred years in the past....

Today, with all the records and data at our disposal, and with our own modern techniques and critical thinking skills to work with, we ought to know better than to rely on such an assumption.

John P. Meier (*A Marginal Jew*, p.90, n.10) accepts that "for Tacitus, 'Christ' was a proper name." This would argue that Tacitus was indeed relying on hearsay, which he has improperly applied. And in fact, Meier goes on to admit that possibility: "It could be that Tacitus is simply repeating what was common knowledge about Christians at the beginning of the 2nd century. Tacitus had been the governor of the province of Asia ca. A.D. 112, and might have had judicial contacts with Christians similar to those reported by Pliny the Younger." Norman Perrin voices a similar opinion in his *Introduction to the New Testament* (p.407), that Tacitus' information "is probably based on the police interrogation of Christians and so is not actually independent of the New Testament or Christian tradition." Van Voorst too admits, after some hedging, that "the most likely source of Tacitus' information about Christ is Tacitus' own dealings with Christians, directly or indirectly" (p.52). By Tacitus' time, Christians would have been using the term "Christ" to refer to their supposed founder; other circles (such as those of Pliny in Bithynia) might still be using it to refer to the Pauline spiritual Son. Either way, if the line is authentic to Tacitus, it was evidently this term he encountered and used in his 'historical' reference to crucifixion by Pilate.

Perhaps the most sweeping admission along these lines is made by R. T. France, in his *The Evidence for Jesus*, a book largely relying on conservative tradition and often appealed to as one of those which have 'refuted' the mythicist case. He says (p.23):

Tacitus' reference to 'Christus' is evidence only for what was believed about Christian origins at the time he wrote...by itself it cannot prove that events happened as Tacitus had been informed, and certainly it cannot carry alone the weight of the role of 'independent testimony' with which it has often been invested.

When so many Christian scholars are willing to acknowledge the unreliability of the source for Tacitus' statement about Christ, one should not be expected to put too much stock in the protestations of those who would have it otherwise.

Christians vs. Chrestians

As will be outlined later, the earliest surviving manuscript of this section of the *Annals* shows that it originally (before a correction was made) contained the word "*Chrestianos*" instead of "*Christianas*," indicating that the former would seem to have been the term used in earlier texts. The importance of this will be discussed, but here it can be said that if "the crowd" was calling these people "Chrestians" and Tacitus merely reproduced it, it is not likely that he saw the 'correct' term in an official report.

Procurator vs. Prefect

Another common argument in favor of Tacitus' failure to consult an official record is that he refers to Pontius Pilate as a "procurator." In Tacitus' time, this was the title given to Roman governors of formal "provinces" of the empire. But

that status had applied to Judea only from the reign of the emperor Claudius, when the area was reorganized and Judea became an official province. Prior to that, in the period encompassing the administration of Pilate, the proper term for the governor of areas like Judea was "prefect," akin to a military "commander," since government in the earlier periods was essentially a military undertaking. This issue is complicated, however, by the original nature of what it was to be a "procurator," making the argument that Tacitus made a mistake and committed an historical anachronism less than secure.

In the earlier period of Augustus and Tiberius, a "procurator" was a financial administrator in the provinces and client states on behalf of the emperor, lacking judicial and military powers; the latter were exercised by "prefects," which was the superior rank. In his role as governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate was a prefect. However, in the case of Judean military governors, including Pilate, they could be given responsibilities as procurator as well, and could thus hold both titles.²²⁸

In this light, we can consider some observations by Eddy and Boyd (p. 181-2):

Regarding the ascription itself, it is entirely possible that Tacitus was intentionally anachronistic for the sake of clarity. Since 'procurator' was the accepted title of Pilate's position among Tacitus's audience, he may have used the term knowing full well that the position used to be titled 'prefect.' But it is even more likely that we are making too much of the distinction between 'procurator' and 'prefect' in the ancient world, for the evidence suggests that these terms were rather fluid in the first century.

For example, though the 'Pilate stone' discovered at Caesarea Maritima gives Pilate the title 'prefect,' both Philo (*Legat.* 38) and Josephus (*Jewish War* 2.169) refer to him as "procurator" (Greek *epitropos*), just as Tacitus does. In fact, Josephus sometimes uses the two terms interchangeably.

It is difficult to pronounce on the choice of term by Philo and Josephus when they were not Romans and not writing in Latin. Were they familiar with the finer distinctions between the two titles at the time of Pilate, Philo as contemporary and Josephus writing in a later time? Perhaps Josephus was merely making an uninformed choice, differing on occasion. Was Tacitus, writing even later than Josephus, familiar with the earlier distinctions? It might be maintained that, as a Roman historian, he ought to have been, but then we might expect that he should want to clarify the situation, rather than cater to his readers' anachronistic views, as Eddy and Boyd suggest. Moreover, in executing Jesus Pilate would have been acting in his role as "prefect," not as "procurator."

Eddy and Boyd also quote Murray Harris who urges the fluidity explanation. He appeals to the use of the term *hegemon* ("governor") for Pilate; but this too is Greek and is moreover drawn from usages in the New Testament. In any case, "fluidity" would be the wrong way to style it, since the two terms in Pilate's time were in fact distinct in applying to different positions and responsibilities, even if the same man could hold both. However, if we cut to the bottom line, much of this is moot. In his primary position as governor, responsible for public order and Rome's position as overlord, Pilate was a "prefect"—as the Pilate stone referred

to by Eddy and Boyd indicates. That Tacitus used the title of Pilate's lesser position as "procurator" would suggest two things: one, he was unclear in his own mind about the distinction or chose to be sloppy about it, either of which would detract from claims of accuracy and reliability; and two, he was unlikely to be working from an official report, since that would have come from Pilate himself, who would certainly have used the primary title for his own position. If "prefect" lay in front of him, using "procurator" would have been rather perverse on Tacitus' part.

2. The Question of Authenticity

We move now to the second category of investigation in regard to the text in Tacitus: was it actually written by him or has it been interpolated? The majority even of critical scholars have not chosen the interpolation option, but there are startling and perplexing observations to be made on the issue of authenticity.

Another Strange Silence

The most prominent one is similar to the situation in regard to Josephus' *Testimonium*, no Christian writer makes mention of this passage in Tacitus for at least three centuries. Why should we expect such mention? For one thing, it would constitute a reference to Jesus by a pagan writer, of which there were precious few in the first couple of centuries. But also, for the simple reason that through those first few centuries Christians were fixated on the problem of persecution, its injustice but also its fascination. So great was this fascination that a host of writings were produced recounting the martyrdoms of this and that figure in early church history, from Peter and Paul and other apostles, to Ignatius and Polycarp, and far beyond. Modern scholars have come to judge that this picture was undoubtedly exaggerated for the period prior to Diocletian (late 3rd century), and that traditions about persecution for the very early period are thoroughly unreliable. Despite that view, they have never thought to cast doubt on what would have been the prime persecution of the age, the slaughter of Christians by Nero after the Great Fire of Rome, even though not a single piece of Christian martyrology written during the first four centuries is devoted to anyone who was said to have been martyred during that slaughter; not even the legendary martyrdoms of Peter and Paul were cast in that context.

The existence of persecution became for Christians an apologetic argument for the veracity of the faith. In the words of Joseph McCabe:²²⁹

According to the Catholic writers, and even the official liturgy of their Church, the Roman community of the first three centuries was so decked and perfumed with saints and martyrs that it must have had a divine spirit in it. Now the far greater part, the overwhelmingly greater part, of the Acts of the Martyrs and Lives of the Saints on which this claim is based are impudent forgeries, perpetrated by Roman Christians from the fourth to the eighth century in order to give a divine halo to the very humble, and very human, history of their Church.

So extreme did they strike later Christian observers that much of this literature was denounced as simple fabrication, even by churchmen. As McCabe says, "many of these forgeries were already notorious in the year 494, when Pope Gelasius timidly and haltingly condemned them."

Thus, there was every reason for Christian writers to appeal to the Tacitus passage to highlight what should have been a prime example of early persecution by the Roman authorities. Indeed, nothing would have rivaled it for drama and extremity. Nor should it be claimed that such writers might not have been aware of Tacitus' writings. Arthur Drews (*op.cit.*, p.27) lists several "Christian writers who are acquainted with Tacitus, such as Tertullian, Jerome, Orosius, Sidonius Apollinaris, Sulpicius Severus, and Cassiodorus." If, to the contrary, defenders argue that the *Annals* of Tacitus were known throughout the centuries, in order to counter the claim of later forgery for the work or even of interpolation of the 15:44 passage, then they must face squarely the problem of the lack of Christian reference to it in the early period.

But this is a sub-issue within a very much deeper problem to be addressed: that Christian (and even other pagan) writers are totally silent for centuries—quite apart from a lack of appeal to Tacitus—on any Neronian persecution itself as a result of the fire.

Tertullian on Nero

We can begin with Tertullian. His *Apology* (written around the year 200) is one great rant against the injustice of Greco-Roman hatred and persecution of Christians. In chapter 2 he dissects Pliny's letter to Trajan on the subject. Yet no such attention is given to the passage in Tacitus' *Annals*. Now, there is a remark in chapter 5 which has been taken as an allusion to it. It is worth looking at the context of the remark (in bold):

Tiberius, accordingly, in whose days the Christian name made its entry into the world, having himself received intelligence from Palestine of events which had clearly shown the truth of Christ's divinity, brought the matter before the Senate, with his own decision in favor of Christ. The Senate, because it had not given the approval itself, rejected his proposal. Caesar held to his opinion, threatening wrath against all accusers of the Christians. **Consult your histories; you will there find that Nero was the first who assailed with the imperial sword the Christian sect, making progress then especially at Rome.** But we glory in having our condemnation hallowed by the hostility of such a wretch. For any one who knows him, can understand that not except as being of singular excellence did anything bring on it Nero's condemnation. Domitian, too, a man of Nero's type in cruelty, tried his hand at persecution; but as he had something of the human in him, he soon put an end to what he had begun, even restoring again those whom he had banished.

The opening remarks about Tiberius, if it is not an oral legend, may relate to a Christian document known by Tertullian, one which would clearly have had no

basis in reality, since it makes Tiberius a believer in Christ's divinity. It may have been part of a complex of forgeries in the latter 2nd century of alleged letters and reports from Pilate to the emperor on the subject of Jesus' crucifixion. Justin is the first to witness to such things in his Apology 48, although some scholars suggest that the "Acts of Pilate" he refers to in passing may be simply a product of his own wishful thinking. But is Tertullian's succeeding reference liable to be anything different?

What are the "histories" that he urges his pagan reader to consult? We should note that the word for "histories" here is "*commentarios*" which may be better translated as "records," whereas when he elsewhere refers directly to Tacitus' works he calls them "*historiae*," thus calling into question that here he has in mind the *Annals*. It could be no more than the same sort of 'record' he has just described about Tiberius, which is to say, a Christian fabrication which he assumes the Romans have a copy of. Such is indicated when later in the Apology (ch.21) he declares that the Romans also have "in your archives" an account of the world darkness at the crucifixion. This may be yet another reference to a communication from Pilate, a circulating forgery in Christian communities. Or, he could simply have presumed that documentary records of all these things existed even if they did not, somewhat in the manner of Justin. The "records" Tertullian refers to which supposedly contained the history of some persecution by Nero may have had no more substance than the report of the darkness at the crucifixion or the efforts of Tiberius to champion Jesus' divinity. To recommend these fantasies to the pagan shows the height of naivete which early Christian apologists attained.

We also fail to detect in Tertullian's language any suggestion, in regard to whatever persecution he has attributed to Nero, that it was as a consequence of the fire. Rather, it was because of Christians' "singular excellence" that he says Nero was led to condemn them. If there were a tradition that Christians had brought their misfortune upon themselves because of their guilt in setting the fire, Tertullian would surely have been ready to defend them against such an accusation. If Nero felt "hostility" toward Christians as a result of the fire, that hostility would have been shared by the populace as well, yet Tertullian places the entire cause of the persecution in the personal animosity of the emperor. Not a hint of any wider factor can be heard behind his language.

But to return to his silence on the Tacitean passage itself. Only a few chapters earlier, he has taken apart Pliny's letter to Trajan, waxing furiously and bitterly about the injustices and contradictions in the Roman policy toward Christians at that time. Why did he not do the same for Tacitus, with its much more lurid and offensive descriptions of the horrors and injustices inflicted on the Christians, in language that rivaled Tertullian's own? It is almost inconceivable that he would not be led to discuss it directly. As for what he does say, referring to Nero being the first "who assailed with the imperial sword the Christian sect," this may well be limited to the legendary executions of Peter and Paul. In fact, that is precisely what he conveys in his *Scorpiace* (ch. 15):

We read the lives of the Caesars: At Rome Nero was the first who stained with blood the rising faith. Then [or, at that time] is Peter girt by another, when he is made fast to the cross. Then does Paul obtain a birth suited to Roman citizenship, when in Rome he springs to life again ennobled by martyrdom. Wherever I read of these occurrences, so soon as I do so I learn to suffer; nor does it signify to me which I follow as teachers of martyrdom, whether the declarations or the deaths of the apostles, save that in their deaths I recall their declarations also.²³⁰

The reference to "lives of the Caesars" would seem to be a reference to Suetonius, and that work may well be what Tertullian had in mind in the above quote containing "consult your histories." But Suetonius, in his brief reference to "punishment of the Christians" in his *Life of Nero* (to be examined shortly), had given no specifics as to the cause and nature of this punishment, and Tertullian's only example of those whom Nero "stained with blood" are Peter and Paul, an example formed by Christian legend. There is nothing to prevent Tertullian from having presumed that Suetonius was speaking of the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul, perhaps envisioning a few others associated with them. Alternatively, if one wishes to expand the point (and we will), it is possible that something like Suetonius' brief and unspecific remark in his *Life of Nero* led Tertullian—and others—to envision some kind of persecution of Christians by Nero in addition to that of Peter and Paul. If so, such an envisioning seems to have contained no details, since none are ever supplied, and thus it cannot be securely related to the scene in Tacitus, much less support its authenticity. Such a dramatic event, if historical, would hardly have bequeathed no details to later Christian tradition, or prompted Christian writers to show a universal silence on such details, let alone on all mention of the underlying cause. Tertullian speaks of the "teachers of martyrdom," but examples of these are also limited to the apostles. Had he been familiar with Tacitus, or the event which Tacitus describes, many more dramatic examples of teachers would have been available, and we can hardly think that he would have failed to present any of them, not even collectively.

In *De Praescriptione* (On Prescription Against Heretics), ch. 36, Tertullian praises the apostolic churches of the empire and what can be learned from them. When he gets to Rome itself, he eulogizes its heritage in blood:

How happy is its church, on which apostles poured forth all their doctrine along with their blood! Where Peter endures a passion like his Lord's! Where Paul wins his crown in a death like John's! Where the Apostle John was first plunged, unhurt, into boiling oil, and then remitted to his island-exile!

This passage enumerates the cities having churches that are associated with particular apostles, from Corinth to Rome; they are to be marked and valued for the fact of the apostolic authority which proceeds from them, for the continued presence of their thrones, for their voices in the writings they produced which are still read there. Persecution is not the main point, as it is not mentioned in regard to any other place except Rome. It is when he gets to that city, the last on his list,

that Tertullian brings up the subject of martyrdom, apparently viewing this as the most significant way in which the Roman apostolic center has benefited and by which it is to be regarded. The particular feature about Rome, then, is the Christian blood that has been spilled there—any and all of that blood. Thus there was no need for Tertullian to confine himself to speaking only of the blood of the apostles. If he knew of a Neronian persecution such as Tacitus describes, it would have cried out for inclusion as part of "what she [Rome] has learned, what taught." Yet all he mentions are the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul, and a legend about the apostle John who escaped death for exile. (The latter is usually allotted to a persecution under Domitian.) In view of its silence on any martyrs beyond the apostles, this passage should show that Tertullian is not familiar, through Christian tradition, with any general persecution of Christians under Nero.

Tertullian also refers to the persecution under Domitian, showing that he was capable of highlighting general persecutions beyond that of individual apostles, although scholars today doubt a Domitian persecution entirely or else view it as having been low-key and sporadic (see below). In any case, Tertullian is a prime illustration of the Christian obsession with persecution. Once again, this raises the perplexing question of why no one before the very end of the 4th century offered any comment reflecting the dramatic account which we find in Tacitus.

The Epistle of Clement

It is often claimed that the epistle known as 1 Clement, traditionally dated to the 90s of the 1st century, refers obliquely to the Neronian persecution. After the writer has spoken of Peter and Paul in chapter 5, he goes on in chapter 6 to say: "To these men with their holy lives was gathered a great multitude of the chosen, who were the victims of jealousy and offered among us the fairest example in their endurance under many indignities and tortures." He speaks of women "suffering terrible and unholy indignities," who "steadfastly finished the course of faith and received a noble reward" (translated by Kirsopp Lake, in the *Loeb Classical Library*). This is woolly language which fails to speak explicitly of death and execution. But it follows on similar language which has been applied even to Peter and Paul.

While chapter 5 is often appealed to as early evidence of those apostles' martyrdoms in Rome, the text actually does anything but tell us that. Verse 4, for example, is frustratingly vague: "Peter, who because of unrighteous jealousy suffered not one or two but many trials, and having thus given his testimony went to the glorious place which was his due." Neither is Paul explicitly said to have been martyred in Rome, but simply "passed out of this world (after) bearing his testimony before kings and rulers." (And this from a writer who is speaking from Rome itself, later famed for both martyrdoms!) In fact, it is not even explicitly stated that they were martyred. Verse 2 says that they "were persecuted and contended until death" (*edixthesan kai heos thanatou ethlesan*). Another translation (by M. Staniforth, in the Penguin *Early Christian Writers*) renders the line, "and had to keep up the struggle till death ended their days." The meaning

of the latter could be natural causes, for all it tells us. In this document from the end of the 1st century, a hundred years before Tertullian, not even a firm tradition about the deaths of Peter and Paul in Rome seems to have been established.

It is thus difficult to share the confidence of those who regard the opening of chapter 6 as a reference to a Neronian persecution. It is not even clear that the "great multitude of the chosen" that were "gathered" to Peter and Paul and suffered persecution as well did so at the same time. The author may have in mind subsequent persecutions in general since the days of those apostles' experiences. Staniforth, in fact, renders it along such lines: "Besides these men of saintly life, there are many more of the elect who have undergone hardships and torments instigated by jealousy." This would be a strange way of describing the death of the Roman Christian community convicted as arsonists of the Great Fire.

The author of 1 Clement is another who makes what seems to be a reference to persecution under Domitian. The epistle opens: "Owing to the sudden and repeated misfortunes and calamities [or, critical circumstances] which have befallen us..." This has traditionally been interpreted as referring to persecution by Domitian, although the evidence is uncertain, and the 3rd century historian Cassius Dio, commonly appealed to, says only (67.14) that certain people who "drifted into Jewish ways"—including the consul Flavius Clemens—were condemned on the charge of atheism. "Some of these were put to death, and the rest were at least deprived of their property." Dio goes on to speak of certain of these individuals by name, all of it conveying the impression that the persecution may not have been a general one, but directed by the paranoid Domitian against high profile citizens, especially those surrounding him, who had 'converted' to something which might or might not be Christianity in whatever state it existed in Rome toward the end of the 1st century. (To judge by the epistle 1 Clement, it is by no means established that this state included an historical Jesus.) However, by the middle of the 2nd century, a general persecution of Christians was clearly envisioned for the reign of Domitian, including the torture and banishment of the apostle John to the island of Patmos. But still we find no parallel concept for the reign of Nero.

Eusebius on Nero

The church historian Eusebius is also silent on Tacitus. In Book II, chapter 22 of *History of the Church*, he describes the circumstances of Paul's (presumed) martyrdom in Rome, and he views Nero as having directed Paul's imprisonment and eventual execution. And yet he too fails to make any mention of the general Neronian persecution of Christians as a result of the fire, even though it would have been natural to make such a link. There are Christian commentators today who assume that Paul's martyrdom (and Peter's) was part of the massacre of Christians following the fire, so it is very likely that Eusebius would have done the same. In fact, Eusebius calculates (in great detail) that there were two trials for Paul, at the first of which he was exonerated and freed by Nero. He suggests

that this was because "Nero's disposition was milder" at the earlier time. (G. A. Williamson, in his translation of *History of the Church*, offers in a footnote that "Nero's tyranny did not begin until A.D. 62, when Paul's first imprisonment was over.") Eusebius then says that Nero went on "to commit abominable crimes " referring to his reign of terror over family and friends, after which he "attacked the apostles along with others." Who were these "others"? Again, a passing comment without details, suggesting nothing more than Christians associated with Paul, such as the "Aristarchus" whom Eusebius (in 22:1) says accompanied Paul as a prisoner to Rome. Are those three words "along with others" to be taken as a summary of the great Tacitean slaughter? One would hardly think so.

We can pause a moment and ask: is it possible that Christians for centuries simply were not familiar with the *Annals*, or with this passage in particular? A moment's thought should render this difficult to conceive. It is akin to asking that if a passage such as the extant *Testimonium* were present in Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* 18, would Christians not have come to know of it for centuries? (It spread quickly enough after Eusebius brought it to life.) If the extant passage in Tacitus describing Nero's treatment of the Christians existed at all, even, let's say, without the reference to Christ, any widely-read Christian writer—and there were many—would sooner or later have encountered it, and from that point, because of its nature, it would have spread throughout Christian literary circles and from there to the general population. It becomes impossible to imagine that Eusebius, by the early 4th century, would not have been familiar with it.

At this point, Eusebius cuts away and in a long chapter 23 goes to Jerusalem to describe the martyrdom of James the Just. This he does in great detail, drawing on legends of the event appearing in Hegesippus. Once again we are struck by the contrast between these great scenes of martyrdom on the part of various apostles, yet the ghastly description of Nero's persecution of Christians which we find in the *Annals* has had no influence on him—or on any other Christian writer to his time—beyond a presumption that a handful of neutral words refer to that event. For all the mania for sensationalist literature about the sufferings and deaths of the saints in those first few centuries, not a single individual or group is associated in such writings with the Neronian persecution as described in Tacitus.

Eusebius then returns in chapter 25 to the topic of Nero and the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul. He refers to Nero as "the monster of depravity," to that emperor's "senseless destruction of innumerable lives," and goes on to detail the murders of his "mother, brothers, and wife alike, to say nothing of countless other members of his family." This description shows that general remarks about Nero's murderous habits can be understood simply as referring to his treatment of other Romans; no Christians are necessary. In fact, we wait in vain for a single word to be allotted to his destruction of innumerable Christian lives as described in Tacitus. Ironically, it is Williamson (*op.cit.*, p. 104) who supplies that missing word, in his heading "The Neronian Persecution" and in a footnote: "In A.D. 64

the Parthians were defeated, Rome was burnt, and the Christians were persecuted." Such things are not drawn from the text itself which Williamson is translating.

What, in fact, does Eusebius have to say? Introducing his further comments with "All this left one crime still to be added to his account," he outlines that crime, and here is where Christians are introduced: "he was the first of the emperors to be the declared enemy of the worship of Almighty God." This crime Eusebius says he has taken from Tertullian, from the passage looked at above (p.597). As Eusebius quotes it:

Study your records: there you will find that Nero was the first that persecuted this doctrine when, after subjugating the entire East, at Rome especially he treated everyone with savagery. That such a man was author of our chastisement fills us with pride.

He clearly knows no more than what Tertullian has told him, which, as we noted earlier, is nothing specific and cannot be securely identified with either the Tacitus account, or knowledge of the event which Tacitus has written about. Nor does Eusebius himself make an identifiable link from Tertullian to the Tacitus account, or to a Neronian persecution like that described there, an event which, regardless of whether he had read the *Annals* or not, ought by this time to have been known through tradition to every Christian, and certainly to any Christian historian. What writer would *not* make such a link from Tertullian's remark? *Unless* he was familiar with no such persecution, and certainly not with a persecution on the scale and for the reason described in Tacitus.

What has Eusebius understood from his reading of Tertullian (the quoted passage above)? First we should note that Eusebius has apparently used a poor translation into Greek of Tertullian's original Latin. A comparison of the above with the "consult your records" passage quoted earlier from Tertullian himself shows something rather dissimilar. But did Eusebius take this as referring to something separate from the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul? (It has already been shown that no such separate martyrdom of other Christians can be gleaned from Tertullian's own words.) It would be very difficult to say, since once again we receive no elucidation. Any attempt to read into Eusebius' reading of Tertullian something that has Tacitus in mind or the tradition which now appears in Tacitus, is dubious. For once again we would have a dramatic event of Christian slaughter passed over in a few words that give us no specifics. In fact, we cannot even tell if the phrase "at Rome he treated everyone with savagery" is to be taken as referring only to Christians (either by the translator or by Eusebius himself), or simply to Nero's general depravity toward everyone around him. After he returned from the east is when that depravity began, first exercised against other Romans, as even Eusebius presents it. Eusebius also described Nero's "crime" against Christianity as being "the first of the emperors to be declared enemy of the worship of Almighty God." Is this the best he can do to refer to the mass murder of Christians accused of burning down a good part of the city of Rome? Or is he simply paraphrasing Tertullian's equally vague comment about Nero?

And what *are* the specifics Eusebius supplies about what Nero did?

Thus having been announced [or, having announced himself] as the first among the principal enemies of God, he was led on to the slaughter of the apostles. It is recorded that in his reign Paul was beheaded in Rome itself, and that Peter likewise was crucified, and this record is confirmed by the fact that the cemeteries there are still called by the names of Peter and Paul...

It has been claimed that in the first sentence above we have a clear and grammatically precise reference to a separate event under Nero, only then followed by the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul. And yet this would lead us once more down the same perplexing, opaque path. Why is such a strange and non-committal phrase as "being announced as the first among the principal enemies of God" to be regarded as a natural or adequate reference to the Tacitean horror spectacle? What would that past tense (the aorist "announced") refer back to? Unfortunately, to more non-specifics like being declared "enemy of the worship of Almighty God." Even if we took it as referring back to that poor translation of Tertullian, "he exercised his cruelty against all at Rome," this too, as we've shown, is non-specific, if a bit more sanguinary in tone. Why at every turn are we stymied at finding clear Christian knowledge of and reference to an event such as Tacitus portrays? Even Tertullian, in the original of that poor translation, has said only that "Nero was the first who assailed with the imperial sword the Christian sect," and we have shown in his further texts that this can be taken to refer in his mind simply to the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul. Those words of Tertullian would be hard put to offer any specifics that could be said to describe the Tacitean gore-fest.

Eusebius can go on to describe in some detail the murder of the apostles Peter and Paul and the continued existence of their cemeteries. He can go on to include as further witness to their martyrdoms the writings of two churchmen. Yet he gives us nothing about the vast numbers and hideous experiences of poor Christians tortured and murdered in Nero's pogrom, or the accusation that they had set the Great Fire. There are no witnesses offered to their martyrdom. Keep in mind that if Tacitus is authentic, the event he describes was not simply the martyrdom of a lot of individuals. It would have constituted the eradication of a vast portion, if not perhaps the entirety, of the Roman Christian community in the capital of the empire, the city that was to become the very seat of the Christian Church. Would this catastrophic historical event not have merited a bit of attention, a few extra details? Thus, grammatical indications notwithstanding, it becomes reasonable to believe that Eusebius' starting point may simply have been Christian legend that Peter and Paul were martyred at Rome in the time of Nero. Even the verb "*epairo*," usually translated as "he was led on to" as though there is a sequence involved, simply means to "raise/rise up," in the sense of being impelled to do something, and could thus point solely forward to the murder of the apostles, not back to some previous murder of a whole community of other Christians. For all that we can see, the former alone constitutes what Eusebius knows of the 'Neronian persecution.'

Later in *History of the Church* (III, 17) Eusebius recounts a persecution by the emperor Domitian:

Many were the victims of Domitian's appalling cruelty. At Rome great numbers of men distinguished by birth and attainments were executed without a fair trial, and countless other eminent men were for no reason at all banished from the country and their property confiscated. Finally, he showed himself the successor of Nero in enmity and hostility to God. He was, in fact, the second to organize persecution against us, though his father Vespasian had no mischievous designs against us.

If he can recount details about the "appalling cruelty" in regard to Domitian, why was he silent on the very similar and even more horrendous suffering under Nero? If he could know about such traditions attached to Domitian, why would he not have known about those in regard to Nero? And how was Domitian, according to Eusebius, "the successor of Nero"? Not in terms of a vast slaughter of innocent Christians, but, in another woolly and non-committal phrase, in "his enmity and hostility to God." *If there were some kind of accusation to be made against Nero which is separate from the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul, it would seem that the latter sort of phrase represents the sum total of what Christian writers were capable of saying about it.*

Arthur Drews (*op.cit.*, p.34-36) points out other silent Christian writers:

The Christian parts of the Sibylline Oracles, which are supposed to have been written in part shortly after this event, have no relation to the Neronian persecution, even where there would be the greatest occasion....Justin, in spite of his praise of the courage and steadfastness of the Christians in their martyrdoms, does not say a word about [the Neronian persecution]....Origen says in his work against Celsus [see Bk. III, 8] that the number of those who suffered death for the faith was inconsiderable....Paulus Orosius [in his *Adversus Paganos Historiae*, vii, 4], the friend and admirer of Augustine (early 5th century), relies expressly on Suetonius for the expulsion of the Jews from Rome under Claudius, and even mentions a Neronian persecution, which, according to him, spread over every province of the empire, but for this does not quote the witness of either Tacitus or Suetonius.

For Drews, this indicates that the latter's "punishment of the Christians by Nero" remark in his *Life of Nero* is an interpolation.

The Acts of Paul and the Acts of Peter

It has been suggested that the Acts of Paul (an apocryphal work written in the latter part of the 2nd century) contains an allusion to the Neronian persecution as a result of the fire. Section 11 tells the tale of the martyrdom of Paul. After a dramatic miracle in which Paul raises a dead boy, Nero finds that many of those surrounding him are Christians, which leads him to seek out other Christians in the city; he has them imprisoned along with Paul. Paul boldly tells the emperor that one day Christ will destroy the world with fire. An enraged Nero decrees

that all the prisoners will themselves be executed by fire, though Paul will die by beheading. There is no mention of the Great Fire itself, or of Christians punished for setting it. The whole proceedings have grown out of the legend of Paul's own martyrdom. Actually, the author of the *Acts of Paul*, by describing this 'round-up' of other Christians as proceeding out of Nero's contact with Paul, is showing his ignorance of the round-up of Christians as a result of the fire and Nero's attempt to put the blame on them. We have no indication that this enlargement on the legend about Paul has been inspired by knowledge of a persecution by Nero such as Tacitus describes. In any case, the latter scene would hardly have been so gutted in scope and intensity, with its historical essence eliminated; it is much more likely to have worked in the other direction, that enlargements on the legend of Paul's martyrdom such as we find in the Acts of Paul eventually led, with the help of other factors, to imagining the much more extravagant scene we now find in Tacitus.

Around the same time, probably in the 180s, another apocryphal writer was busy with the Acts of Peter.²³¹ In the chapter on Peter's martyrdom (9), the writer speaks of the "mass of people" who were daily converted to Christ by the Apostle—and of women to renouncing the marriage bed, falling "in love with the doctrine of purity," much to the distress of their husbands who saw to Peter's arrest and crucifixion upside down. Nero, angry at being denied the opportunity to punish Peter personally, was about to attack those Christian converts, "for he sought to destroy all those brethren who had been made disciples by Peter" (41/12). He was prevented from doing so by a dream in which he was being scourged and told:

"Nero, you cannot now persecute or destroy the servants of Christ. Keep your hands from them!" [The writer then tells us:] And so Nero, being greatly alarmed because of this vision, kept away from the disciples [Peter's converts in Rome] from the time that Peter departed this life. And thereafter the brethren kept together with one accord, rejoicing and exulting in the Lord.

No writer who knew of a general persecution and killing of Christian brethren in the city of Rome by Nero could possibly have constructed this scene, one which effectively rules out the occurrence of any such persecution. After the martyrdom of Peter, he is saying, the brethren in Rome were safe from Nero's depredations. (Nor are we permitted to insert the Great Fire persecution prior to these events, as the text allows for no such thing.) Thus we have what amounts to a tacit denial of the Tacitean event—even though the writer would have been unaware that any such event had been envisioned. We can presume he was a different writer from that of the Acts of Paul, who did create a scene of Neronian persecution of Christians, this time as an adjunct to the martyrdom of Paul, involving a limited number of victims and no connection to the fire. Since the Acts of Paul has thus contradicted the Tacitean scenario as well, both of these apocrypha supply very good evidence that no such tradition was known in the Christian circles of the later 2nd century.

Revelation and the Sibylline Oracles

There is a scene in Revelation which is often pointed to as containing a reference to the Christians martyred by Nero. Before examining that passage, one should note that this document, the apocalypse of apocalypses, employs a range of elements characteristic of the genre, often in obscure and chaotic fashion. Vivid hyperbole and overwrought sensationalism typically run riot. Identifying the meaning and symbolic nature of the various End-time figures and scenarios has challenged many scholars for generations. Contradictions and conundrums abound, simply because the author was not concerned with bringing logic or consistency to his picture (and because scholars insist on introducing the Gospel Jesus into the mix).

For example, in chapter 14, the famous "144,000" are presented as those "who alone from the whole world had been ransomed." (A certain Christian sect today still regards this figure as the total of those from all humanity who are destined to be saved.) In chapter 7, on the other hand, they are first introduced as those who receive the seal of God, as his servants; yet immediately following this another group is presented who are also saved 'by the blood of the Lamb.' It is this group we must examine (7:9-14):

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb... These are the ones who have come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

To identify this group as representing the Christians martyred by Nero after the fire ignores the first verse in the quote. The Roman Christian community was hardly made up of people from every nation, tribe and language. That very world-wide inclusiveness and vast numbers involved indicate that the writer is speaking not only of martyrs of the past but of the future. As David E. Aune (*Harper's Bible Commentary*, p.1310) puts it: "(In 7:9-17) John receives a visionary preview of an innumerable host representing all of the people of God." These are other Christians, over and above the 144,000, who "will perish in the 'great tribulation' (v. 14)..."

Thus we need no past 'great tribulation' to have inspired the author, as some claim. By the time he wrote, persecution was, if not constant and widespread, a fact of life for believers in the Christ. Even a focus on "Babylon" throughout the document is not to be limited to an association merely with the city of Rome. As John Sweet (*Revelation*, p.26) says: "'Babylon' is far more than simply Rome." The "great city" represented the earthly power with all its corruption and cruelty. Sweet regards the visions of the martyrs standing before the throne of the Lamb as all of God's people who have suffered, "whether under Pharaoh, Jezebel or Antiochus, or in the guise of Sodom, Ninevah, Babylon, Jerusalem or finally Rome." Such a concept fits the language and scope of chapter 7's scene. And in 17:5-6, the vision of the woman riding the beast represents "Babylon the great"

and "the great city," and it is she, representing the powers of the world, who is "drunk with the blood of God's people and with the blood of those who had borne their testimony to Jesus." This goes far beyond any association with a²³² Neronian pogrom.

A particularly bloody image is created in 14:19-20, in which an angel is directed to gather in the earth's grape harvest and throw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. "The winepress was trodden outside the city, and for two hundred miles around blood flowed from the press to the height of the horses' bridles." John A. T. Robinson (*Redating the New Testament*, p.230f) interprets this as echoing Nero's slaughter of Christians, suggesting that without a historical provocation like that, the "vindictive reaction" of John's Apocalypse "is scarcely credible." But Revelation is chockfull of other equally horrific scenes of blood and destruction to be wreaked upon the earth, and few if any of those have suffered attempts to be identified with specific historical events. The apocalyptic fever of the times itself, especially in the decades following the Jewish War, would have been sufficient to provoke John's "vindictive reaction." To that we might also add John's own personality, a mind bordering on the psychotic. There are many preachers today who consign non-believers to similar horrors without having witnessed or experienced anything on the scale of the alleged Neronian persecution.

But if John required some immediate inspiration for his vision of persecution, he could have found one in Domitian. Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* V, 30) placed Revelation "toward the end of Domitian's reign" and most modern scholars have followed suit, opting for the year 95 or 96. While those scholars also tend to play down the extent of Domitian's persecution of Christians, Pliny only a decade and a half later witnesses to its operation under Trajan's rule, pointing to the possibility of earlier versions providing an impulse to John in the 90s.

An alternative dating of Revelation has been suggested for the late 60s, following the death of Nero in 68. Two passages in Revelation, in chapters 13 and 17, suggest the so-called *Nero redivivus* legend, in which Nero—either rising from the dead or not having died in the first place—would return at the head of an army to reconquer his kingdom; in that role he was also associated with the Antichrist. But such a legend would hardly have developed within a year of Nero's death, to immediately inspire a writer in Asia Minor; nor does the Christian Antichrist legend seem to have arisen that early. In fact, if Nero and a great slaughter of Christians *had* figured in John's past and provided the inspiration that some would like to read into passages of Revelation, we might expect him to assume a greater role than he does. The two passages which offer a *Nero redivivus* do not assign to him a past atrocity, and in fact he is more or less subsumed into the Antichrist figure who shall arrive in the future. This is the "beast" of chapter 13, who will make war on the saints and be worshiped for a time by the world. These expectations are those of apocalyptic tradition and do not require that Nero himself, in being identified with the beast, was known for some great barbarity against a mass of Christians.

We can consequently dismiss Revelation as providing any sign of Christian knowledge about an episode of persecution on the scale of *Annals* 15:44.

The *Nero redivivus* legend appears in some of the Jewish/Christian Sibylline Oracles, referred to above. Such oracles, in poetic form, were a feature of several societies in the Greco-Roman world, including Egyptian Judaism, extending from Hellenistic times well into the Christian era. As in apocalyptic writing, they were represented as the product of a legendary past prophetess who successfully 'predicted' the future, but they included much genuine prophecy as well. Christianity took over many of the Sibylline Oracles of the Jews and reworked them; the Oracles were known and used by some of the Church Fathers.

Several passages predicting the return of Nero can be found. And while it is difficult to say which might have come under special scrutiny by Christians, it is a fact that no opportunity was taken to amend any of the original Jewish passages on Nero to reflect a dramatic persecution by that emperor of an entire Christian community. One in particular, in Book 5, verses 140-146, stands out:

Him, they say, Zeus himself begot and lady Hera.
 Playing at theatricals with honey-sweet songs rendered
 With melodious voice, he will destroy many men, and his wretched mother.
 He will flee from Babylon [Rome], a terrible and shameless prince
 Whom all mortals and noble men despise.
 For he destroyed many men and laid hands on the womb.
 He sinned against spouses, and was sprung from abominable people..²³³

The destruction of "many men," especially mentioned in close association with his mother, would quite reasonably refer to the friends and family which Nero had murdered. Yet if passages like this fell under Christian eyes, and they were in the habit of interpolating references to reflect their own interests, it is significant that no doctoring was undertaken to add to Nero's list of atrocities what should have been the greatest of them all, the slaughter of Rome's Christians as arsonists of the Great Fire as described in Tacitus.

The Ascension of Isaiah

Finally, we can look at yet another transformation of Nero, this time in the Ascension of Isaiah. The passage from 3:13 to 4:22 has been identified as a Christian insertion into an earlier Jewish work (the first five chapters) now referred to as "the Martyrdom of Isaiah." This section Michael Knibb (*The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol.2, p. 149), on the basis of its *Nero redivivus* feature, dates to the end of the 1st century CE, since "presumably a little time would have been needed for this belief to develop." In 4:2f, the descent of the angel Beliar into the world is prophesied, "the king of this world, which he has ruled ever since it existed." It is clear that Beliar is not simply Nero returned; he is a demonic figure expected at the End time who has existed since creation. Rather, he has assumed the *form* of a "king of iniquity"—Nero, "a murderer of his mother." The *Nero redivivus* legend has apparently become so strong by this time that it has imposed itself on current, more traditional apocalyptic thinking.

In describing this past king, the prophetic text says: "and (he) will persecute the plant which the twelve apostles of the Beloved will have planted; some of the twelve will be given into his hand." In this reference to persecuting "the plant" we are brought back once again to one more example of a frustratingly vague reference to a Neronian persecution of Christianity in general—if we can securely take it in such a fashion. The wording is almost too brief and ambiguous to be sure of anything, and the textual tradition of this document has been long and tortuous. But if we assume that the passage was originally meant to impute to Nero something beyond the murder of a couple of apostles, we can add it to our list of the several other early Christian writings we have looked at which have created the same impression—and like them, regrettably lacking in any specifics which might enable us to decide whether to identify it with a mass persecution such as that outlined in Tacitus.

Accounts of the Fire

All these observations have greatly enlarged the scope of our considerations. It is not just the passage in Tacitus itself whose authenticity has been called into question, and not just the matter of the incidental historical note about Christ and Pontius Pilate which accompanies it. They have undermined the very fact of the Neronian persecution of Christians which surrounds that supposed historical note. Consequently, we should have good reason to doubt the authenticity of the entire passage about Christ and Christianity.

What witness outside Tacitus do we have to the persecution of Christians by Nero in association with the fire? There is none, as we have seen, from Christian sources—until the late 4th century, something to be examined shortly. The only thing which might even partially fit our needs is a passage in the historian Suetonius. Not the famous one about "*Chrestus*" which will be considered in a later section of its own. That has nothing to do with Nero or the fire, and is part of his account of the earlier Claudius. But in his *Lives of the Caesars*, in the book on Nero (ch. 16.2), in a paragraph about Nero's measures to check a variety of abuses, Suetonius inserts a reference to Christians (in bold):

During his reign many abuses were severely punished and put down, and no fewer new laws were made: a limit was set to expenditures; the public banquets were confined to a distribution of food; the sale of any kind of cooked viands in the taverns was forbidden, with the exception of pulse and vegetables, whereas before every sort of dainty was exposed for sale. **Punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition.** He put an end to the diversions of the chariot drivers, who from immunity of long standing claimed the right of ranging at large and amusing themselves by cheating and robbing the people. The pantomimic actors and their partisans were banished from the city.

Arthur Drews was one who judged this sentence an interpolation. This may be too handy a solution, though we will judge whether it reads as an intrusion of sorts. It certainly seems to be incongruous in relation to the surrounding material.

For now, let's assume authenticity. What is missing is any reference to the fire and the charge against the Christians as arsonists. If the latter were the case, it is difficult to think that Suetonius would have dealt with it so briefly and with no mention of its dramatic context. In fact, he conveys the clear impression that the "punishment" was due simply to the objectionable nature of their beliefs, a "new and mischievous superstition."

Nor can we accept the suggestion that Suetonius is here dependent on our extant Tacitus, choosing to drastically abbreviate what he is borrowing and leaving out every hint of its essence. What modern historian would draw on accounts of the Second World War and the Holocaust and merely say in passing that the Chancellor of Germany inflicted punishment on the Jews for their ethnic derivation, leaving out the war, the horrors of the death camps and the sheer number of victims, let alone any comment about the monstrosity of it all?²³⁴

But another consideration ought to rule out that Suetonius can be obliquely referring to the persecution of Christians after the fire. Later in his *Life of Nero*, (ch. 38), he recounts the fire itself, treating the legend of Nero's responsibility for it as factual, something he could not have derived from Tacitus, who does not commit himself and downplays the rumor. Indeed, while Suetonius' account of the fire is shorter, it contains nothing that could be seen as derived from Tacitus. But the most important feature in Suetonius' account of the fire in chapter 38 is that it contains not a word about the Christians as perpetrators of the disaster, nor about their infamous punishment. If Suetonius had in mind such a thing behind the brief sentence in the earlier chapter 16, there can be little doubt that he would have saved the reference to "punishment of the Christians" for inclusion—or at least repeated it—where it belonged, as part of the account of the fire, and no doubt would have provided at least a few details.²³⁵

The fact that Suetonius has not drawn anything on this topic from Tacitus, even though the *Annals* was published only a few years earlier and should have gained some attention in the city's literary circles, is another reason to think that the first manuscripts of Tacitus contained no such description, no account of the victimization of the Christians by Nero and the atrocities visited upon them.

The same situation is found in another prominent historian whose works have come down to us, Cassius Dio in the early 3rd century. He, too, in his extensive *Roman History* has an account of the fire (Bk. 62, ch. 16-18). Like Suetonius, he sides with the popular conception that Nero was responsible for the disaster and portrays his behavior during the week-long conflagration as callous. He, too, seems to draw nothing from Tacitus, neither in specific information nor in the latter's efforts to humanize the emperor and to indicate Nero's concerns for the people and the helpful measures he took. And, as we might expect by now, he has nothing to say about the Christians, or their persecution as arsonists and objects of hatred by the people.

There are indisputably two great mysteries in all this. Where was the *Annals* in the work of succeeding Roman historians for at least three centuries after they were written, and why did they make no impression on anyone during that time

that we can detect? The second mystery is perhaps even greater. Why has all this silence in both the pagan and Christian record of that period, not only in regard to the *Annals* but to the entire subject of Nero's post-fire persecution, not made any impact on modern scholars and apologists who insist on retaining the authenticity and reliability of the Tacitus passage and its witness to a Neronian persecution and an historical Jesus?

Not only has Dio failed to take a cue from either Tacitus or Suetonius, he clearly had no other source for a Christian persecution under Nero. Unlike those earlier historians, he lived at a time when Christianity was fairly well established and very well known. If during his time any tradition had existed of this great persecution by Nero, one might suppose that Dio would be interested in documenting it in his history. If the line about punishment being inflicted on the Christians were actually in Suetonius, Dio may have found it too cryptic to understand, which in itself speaks to no such tradition known in Dio's time, else he should have been led to interpret the Suetonius line as a reference to it. As for the more famous passage in Suetonius' *Life of Claudius*, that too may have rung no Christian bells because it referred to Jews and a "*Chrestus*."

The other Roman writer we need to take note of at this point is Pliny the Younger. In his letter to Trajan (around 112) during his governorship of Bithynia he was not, of course, writing a history, but he was commenting on Christians to the emperor and asking for the latter's advice about their prosecution. He says: "I do not know the nature of the extent of the punishments usually meted out to them...and whether it is the mere name of Christian which is punishable, even if innocent of crime, or rather the crimes associated with the name." While we cannot read into his letter that he knew nothing about Christians before taking up his governorship of Bithynia, we certainly get the impression that he knew very little of them. While he feels that "their stubbornness and unshakeable obstinacy ought not to go unpunished," he seems to convey the opinion that they are rather innocuous in their practices, even commendable in their ethical behavior. Could Pliny possibly have spoken of them as he does if they had been regarded as guilty of burning down the city of Rome barely more than a generation earlier? Could Trajan himself have responded with much the same attitude, laying down a 'go easy' policy for the Christians? How likely is it that either of them would have been aware of and referred to the past "crimes" of the Christians, and yet not have that bitter memory generate some influence upon their judicial attitudes, some fear that Christians were inherently dangerous lunatics? Would not Nero's treatment of the Christians have provided a dramatic precedent in regard to the question of punishment? It might also be noted that Tacitus' supposed intimate knowledge of the Christians and their persecution, as presented in the *Annals*, does not gel with Pliny's apparent lack of knowledge. (On the other hand, we will see later that even Pliny's letter is not without indications of Christian forgery, and if that were the case, it would have to be set aside as an element in the argument against the authenticity of Tacitus.)

A Minor Event under Nero?

If we were to decide to reject interpolation in Suetonius, what are we to make of his brief sentence on the punishment of Christians? As it stands, Suetonius too seems not to know much more, if anything, about the great event recounted in Tacitus than do Christian commentators of the next few centuries. But if that sentence is his, then we are led to ask whether *something* could have happened under Nero involving Christians—although they may not have been so referred to in Nero's day. No 1st century pagan writer refers to "Christians" at all, and the only New Testament document datable in the 1st century containing the term is 1 Peter, in 4:16, written possibly in the 80s. Suetonius, writing around 120, may be retrojecting a term of his own time back some half a century. Or the event he is referring to may have had something to do with Jews, which in the evolution of the matter over time came to be associated with or reinterpreted as Christians.

Such a tradition might eventually have taken on a dimension and scale which it never originally had. That smaller initial scale, having nothing to do with the fire and hardly encompassing the horrific dimensions of the Tacitus passage, could have found a reflection in Suetonius' spare comment, and even later in Tertullian's limited implication behind the reference in his *Apology* to Nero's "imperial sword" wielded against the Christians. (It was suggested earlier that Tertullian's comment may even have been inspired by Suetonius, particularly since he has just said "consult your records," though he was able to take nothing specific from Suetonius' brief remark, which may explain his vagueness.) Finally, by the time of Eusebius, whatever had supposedly happened under Nero has become linked with the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul. But still no vast slaughter of Christians and their victimization as alleged perpetrators of Rome's greatest conflagration. The persecution recounted in Tacitus, then, would seem to belong to the fancies of an era that lies somewhat beyond Eusebius.

But perhaps we can get closer to solving the mystery through a passage from Melito of Sardis, as quoted (apparently through Clement of Alexandria) by Eusebius in his *History of the Church*, IV, 26. This is from Melito's *Petition to Antoninus* (not Pius, but the next emperor Marcus Aurelius) written probably in the 170s. In the midst of the passage, Melito has remarked:

Of all the emperors, the only ones ever persuaded by malicious advisers to misrepresent our doctrine were Nero and Domitian, who were the source of the unreasonable custom of laying false information against the Christians. But their ignorance was corrected by your religious predecessors [i.e., former emperors], who constantly rebuked in writing all who ventured to make trouble for our people.

Here we have another expression of that limited understanding of an event or condition under Nero. For Melito, we cannot even be sure that in his mind such an event involved death for those persecuted. Why specify simply "laying false information" if the event encompassed mass murder? And later emperors merely rebuked any who "made trouble for our people." (Why would they have done so

if Christians had once burned down the city?) Neither the language nor the tone throughout this passage would even remotely do justice to the monstrous horror of the presentation in Tacitus, and it is again difficult to understand how Melito could touch on the subject of a Neronian persecution and give not a hint of the atrocities it supposedly involved. (The same language in regard to Domitian suggests the scholarly downplay of the extent of his persecution is also justified.)

It is a few decades later that we have encountered the next stage in Tertullian, in Apology 5, where his view of the matter is that in "your records" Nero was the first "to assail the Christian sect with the imperial sword." This does suggest suffering and death, and certainly Tertullian must have had that in mind to judge by the overall content of his Apology. But did he envision it as involving more than Peter and Paul and perhaps a few of their followers? The event he seems to allude to is not spelled out. Notably, once again no link is provided to Tacitus nor to a context of the fire, a context we must wait another two centuries for.

But now consider another translation of the Melito passage in Eusebius. (This is from *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1: Eusebius.) There the passage from Melito is translated thus, accompanied by a proviso note by the translator that "The sentence is a difficult one and has been interpreted in various ways." (The endnote number in the text is that of the translator.)

Nero and Domitian, alone, persuaded by certain calumniators, have wished to slander our doctrine, and from them it has come to pass that the falsehood²²⁷ has been handed down, in consequence of an unreasonable practice which prevails of bringing slanderous accusations against the Christians.

Even more so than the previous translation, the language here is so mild as to be innocuous. There is virtually no hint of suffering and death under Nero, but only "slander of our doctrine," this being the genesis of a subsequent practice of "falsehood" against the Christians. (Much of this could merely be referring to the sort of "slander" about Christian practices we find in the mouth of the pagan Caecilius in *Minucius Felix*, written a little earlier than Melito.) There is no reason to postulate that Melito deliberately held off giving even an implication of the atrocities suffered under Nero, and we must again conclude that here is a Christian writer in the latter 2nd century who was familiar with no such extreme persecution, and certainly no such passage in Tacitus as now stands there.

Blaming the Christians

But it is the little endnote by this translator which points to something most suggestive. He says: "The reference seems to be to the common belief that the Christians were responsible for all the evils which at any time happened, such as earthquakes, floods, famines, etc." This "common belief" is witnessed to in Tertullian's Apology 40 (trans., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol.3, p.47):

...they think the Christians are the cause of every public disaster, of every affliction with which the people are visited. If the Tiber rises as high as the city walls, if the Nile does not send its waters up over the fields, if the

heavens give no rain, if there is an earthquake, if there is famine or pestilence, straightway the cry is, "Away with the Christians to the lion!"

A reference to this idea is also found in the spurious letters between Paul and Seneca, a philosopher and tutor to Nero, forged at some time in the 4th century. Seneca says to Paul:

Can you possibly think that I am not distressed and grieved that capital punishment is still visited upon you innocent persons? As also that all the people are convinced of your cruelty and criminal malignity, believing that all evil in the city is owing to you? [*New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. 1, p. 139]

Although we do not yet see in either of those documents its ultimate fruition in the thinking of Christians themselves, what would have been more natural than to have had such popular prejudice in the Roman mind attract the additional accusation that the historic fire in Rome had also been the responsibility of the Christians? Assigning to them the disasters of the present could well have led to assigning to them the disasters of the past, even long past, and the most inviting of those disasters would have been the Great Fire.²³⁶

Exactly when such an idea might have formed would be difficult to say, as it does not surface in extant pagan writings or in Christian commentary on them. But once taking root in Roman consciousness it would inevitably have made the crossover to the Christian one; indeed, we can believe that Christians would have embraced it with a perverse satisfaction. We have remarked on the obsessive fascination among Christians for their own history of martyrdom, seen not only in the extensive literature on the lives and deaths of the Saints, but even in certain Fathers' own writings. Tertullian treats persecution as a badge of honor. We hear even a desire for martyrdom personally expressed by Ignatius (even if those words have been put into his mouth after his death). Christian language in their martyrologies is at least as garish and overwrought as the language found in the Tacitus passage. As someone remarked, we can recognize a natural sectarian tendency for "painting our own group as perennial victims in order to stifle criticism and allow us to advance our claims for privileges."

Thus we have been led to a feasible explanation for the later genesis of the passage in Tacitus and the idea of the persecution by Nero for causing the Great Fire: the phenomenon of 'blaming the Christians.' Like the *Testimonium*, its embodiment does not emerge in Christians' own writings until the 4th century, in this case at its very end. As it stands, *Annals* 15:44 may be as much a Christian product as the extant *Testimonium* in Josephus is. But now we face a series of possibilities. As is claimed for the *Testimonium*, would this blame have built on *something* in Tacitus? Might Tacitus have referred to a situation on a mild level of 'persecution' or defamation which would fit with the impression conveyed by Melito of Sardis about Christian ill-treatment in the time of Nero: attacks on some Christian or Jewish community in Rome whose doctrines or apocalyptic expectations were held in contempt by the emperor and/or the people, remarks perhaps in close proximity to the account of the fire but not associated with it?

Apart from whether that was the case, who might actually have tampered with the Tacitus passage? Could we theorize that the account of the fire was first reworked by a *Roman* scribe to set it on the path of an association of Christians with its setting, given the pagan propensity just outlined to blame them for every misadventure that came along? Some time later, a Christian scribe might then have worked on it further. Or was the entire thing a Christian insertion into the *Annals*—*ex nihilo* as far as any literary precedent was concerned—giving expression to an 'in the air' accusation that Christians had been responsible for the burning of the city at the time of Nero? Either one could have envisioned as part of the picture the Christians suffering some punishment for it. (The cryptic passage in Suetonius, if authentic, would have supported this.) A Christian redactor's motive might have been a desire to create yet another powerful piece of inspiring martyrology, this time from the pen of a Roman historian no less, and also, perhaps, to introduce a reference to Christ, who had an annoying habit of turning up missing in so many of those historians.

Prior to such a Roman/Christian collaboration to develop the dramatic legend of a Neronian persecution, Christian commentators would have had no concrete basis—or a very mild one—upon which to envision Nero's animosity, thus explaining why the references we have looked at which may possibly point in such a direction are so obscure, cursory and unspecific. Other influences on the Christian impulse to build up Nero as the great persecutor would have been Peter and Paul's association with that emperor and the legends of their martyrdom at Rome during his time. As well, Nero was seen as the Antichrist, due to arrive at the apocalyptic End-time, the future enemy of the Messiah; thus, in a balance between future and past, it was natural for him to become the great enemy of Christianity at its beginning ('the first to express hostility to the faith,' a thought encountered in more than one writer). Drews also suggests (*op.cit.*, p.46) "the political interest of the Christians in representing themselves as Nero's victims, in order to win the favor and protection of his successors on that account."

Indeed, we could consider, for those reasons just outlined, that the gradual development of a Christian conception of Nero as the first great persecutor could have occurred without *any* particular event, minor or otherwise, being at the root of it, other than growing legends about the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul. This option, however, would probably require that the passage in Suetonius about 'punishment of the Christians' be judged an interpolation, and thus we return to it for a second look.

Another Look at Suetonius

We are, of course, engaging in a good deal of varied speculation, but it is speculation grounded in a wide range of texts. It would reasonably account for the very strange situation in regard to evolving Christian attitudes toward some form of persecution under Nero and their long-delayed awareness of a link to the fire. Some of that speculation is affected by the only Roman witness we have outside of Tacitus to the situation in question, the brief sentence looked at earlier

in Suetonius' *Life of Nero* (16:2): "Punishment [*supplicio*] was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition."

It seems incredible, as noted before, that if this 'punishment' was in regard to something as dramatic as the accusation that they had burned down the city of Rome, Suetonius would have given no indication of it. The word "*supplicio*" has a range of application and may not always apply to an execution (though it usually does). However, Suetonius may have used it here in an unspecific way, perhaps because he knew few if any details about what those "Christians" had actually undergone. As noted before, it is hardly likely he was paraphrasing Tacitus with its vivid and sanguinary depictions.

If we look back on the context of this sentence (see p.610), "punishment" as referring to death, let alone to the Tacitean scene of mass slaughter, would be grossly out of place, a monstrous weed in a patch of dandelions. The paragraph opens with the comment that under Nero "many and harsh were the punishments and curbs." What were those 'harsh punishments and curbs'? Setting a limit to expenditures, restricting public banquets and forbidding the sale of meat in taverns, curbing the liberties taken by the chariot drivers, some of whom were scam artists and robbers, banning pantomime actors. Dropped into the middle of this, right after a reference to the proscription against selling "every sort of dainty" in taverns, comes the "Punishment was inflicted on the Christians..." Apparently Suetonius could make the leap from barroom overindulgence in sweets to the torture and massacre of thousands of people after barely a pause for breath. The utter destruction of almost the entire city—if that is what lay in the background of his thought—is apparently on the same level of atrocity as state overspending and chomping on hamburgers in the bistros.

The more one tries to read into that intrusive sentence in the direction of a Tacitean diorama of conflagration and butchery, the more it cries out interpolation. And perhaps that is so, further enabling us to drop any necessity for postulating an actual minor event under Nero to explain the development of that curiously mild and unspecific Christian tradition about him. On the other hand, if we wish to retain Suetonius' authenticity, and if his brief statement can be reduced in scope to the level of some form of disorder or a curbing of Christian or Jewish activities in the city by Nero, the more secure would be its position in the paragraph. In that case, we would have a clean fit with the picture of an evolution of some minor situation during the reign of Nero, whether originally noted by Tacitus or not, into the full-blown blood-soaked drama set against the backdrop of a burned out metropolis. In any of these scenarios we are still left with a discrediting of the authenticity of the scene in *Annals* 15:44.

In regard to Tacitus' and Suetonius' references to Christians, there is no mention of either of those writers by Eusebius, despite his ongoing interest in martyrdom throughout the *History of the Church*. Second, as Jay Raskin has observed, can it be simply a coincidence that both Tacitus and Suetonius make mention of Christians only in their respective passages regarding Nero? (The "*Chrestus*" passage in Suetonius' *Life of Claudius*, as we shall see, is almost

certainly not to Christ and Christians, but to Jews.) Should we believe that both historians' knowledge of the movement and its founder was limited to the Neronian situation?

Raskin also observes that the reference to Christ in Tacitus' *Annals* 15:44 conveys the impression that this is the first mention of him; there certainly is no 'reference back' attached to it, which is often encountered in ancient historians when they are mentioning someone a second time. But this would mean that Tacitus made no mention of Christ or his resulting movement at the point when he had supposedly lived and died. We know that this is the case in his *Histories*: when he digresses in the middle of the Jewish War to offer a brief history of the Jews and reaches the reign of Tiberius, there is no mention of Jesus and Christianity, nor of Pontius Pilate (who also seems to be enjoying his first mention in *Annals* 15). Tacitus merely says (*Histories* V, 9.2) that in Palestine at this time "all was quiet." (He was speaking of the Jewish political situation.)

But this silence would also seem to be the case for the portion of the *Annals* which dealt with that same period, and here we encounter a curious situation. Book V of the *Annals*, covering much of the reign of Tiberius, is extant—except for a lacuna which spans the years from mid-29 CE to mid-31 CE. This, of course, covers the period to which the ministry and death of Jesus was assigned by early Christians, once the Gospels became historical.²³⁷ Richard Carrier is one who has postulated that this is a deliberate excision by Christian copyists, who would have found in those chapters no mention of Jesus, or the miracles attendant upon his crucifixion (the darkness, the rising of corpses from their graves and so on, as well as Jesus' own resurrection). Such a void may have been felt as too big to fill by interpolation, and so those chapters of the *Annals* were simply consigned to the cutting room floor.²³⁸

Kindling the Fire - Sulpicius Severus

If something was happening behind the scenes to an originally less dramatic story about Nero and the Christians, or simply as part of a process of developing attitudes toward Nero not involving any root event at all, when does the ultimate product emerge onto the Christian stage? The first entrance comes in the spurious letters between Paul and Seneca. In the same letter we looked at earlier in which 'Seneca' remarks about the Christians being blamed for everything, the Roman philosopher (who himself was forced by Nero to commit suicide) writes to Paul that fire is a misfortune that the Roman capital has often had to suffer. We all know what the cause is, he claims, implying the evil of the city, but

Christians and Jews are—worse luck!—executed as fire-raisers, as commonly happens.

It is difficult to be sure whether Seneca is supposed to be commenting on the event of the fire and the Neronian persecution. The forger is, after all, including Jews in the equation (perhaps a marker that Jews were the object in an original situation under Nero?), and he seems to be speaking in generalities. Nor is there anything to indicate reliance on Tacitus. But this is the earliest suggestion of a

linkage between Christian persecution and the setting of fires. While some date these letters to the 3rd century, others have placed them in the 4th century some time prior to Jerome, who is the first to attest to them (around 392, in *De Viris Illustribus* 12). Jerome speaks of them as "read by many," but he seems to be lacking the final two, as though their process of creation is still not completed. Since Eusebius shows no knowledge of such spurious correspondence (the man who produced a letter from Jesus would hardly shrink from mentioning a letter from Seneca), we may presume that they were written after him, perhaps in the middle of the 4th century. (See *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol.2, p.133-141.) Still, as yet we have no witness to the passage in Tacitus.

That was to come shortly afterwards. Around the year 400, a Christian monk in Aquitaine named Sulpicius Severus wrote a *Chronicle* of the world in two volumes. In chapter 29 of Book 2, he states:

In the meantime, the number of Christians being now very large, it happened that Rome was destroyed by fire, while Nero was stationed at Antium. But the opinion of all cast the odium of causing the fire upon the emperor, and he was believed in this way to have sought for the glory of building a new city. And in fact, Nero could not by any means he tried escape from the charge that the fire had been caused by his orders. He therefore turned the accusation against the Christians, and the most cruel tortures were accordingly inflicted upon the innocent. Nay, even new kinds of death were invented, so that, being covered in the skins of wild beasts, they perished by being devoured by dogs, while many were crucified or slain by fire, and not a few were set apart for this purpose, that, when the day came to a close, they should be consumed to serve for light during the night. In this way, cruelty first began to be manifested against the Christians. Afterwards, too, their religion was prohibited by laws which were enacted; and by edicts openly set forth it was proclaimed unlawful to be a Christian. At that time Paul and Peter were condemned to death, the former being beheaded with a sword, while Peter suffered crucifixion.²³⁹

This passage is the sort of thing we should expect to find in any historian paraphrasing Tacitus. Sulpicius Severus would have taken recognizable phrases from the extant text we know and summarized others, creating a brief but well-ordered account which contains the essence of the Tacitean passage in regard to the persecution. If one compares this with *Annals* 15:44, one can observe that Severus has apparently softened or eliminated the derogatory remarks he found in Tacitus, such as "a class hated for their abominations" or Christianity as "a mischievous superstition," introducing pro-Christian elements of his own, such as that the victims were "innocent." The very close parallel wording and sequence of ideas, particularly in the description of the tortures, makes it certain that there is a literary relationship between the two texts. But in which direction?

Since no one before Severus shows any knowledge, let alone usage, of *Annals* 15:44, and since he does not declare a source or even that he was borrowing from a written document, we cannot automatically presume a usage of

Tacitus, although this is certainly possible. Perhaps the most important point attention has been called to the fact that he has left out a key statement found in Tacitus, the one to do with "*Christus*" and his crucifixion by Pilate. This suggests to some that the entire passage about Christians in Severus is original to him, while a later Christian scribe drew on it to insert a passage into *Annals* 15:44, adding his own words about Christ.

That omission, however, may not be as critical as it looks. Severus might well have passed up repeating from Tacitus something which he knew his readers were familiar with—especially since he wasn't quoting, which would make its inclusion rather odd-sounding coming from himself. On the other hand, if we postulate an initial insertion into Tacitus by a Roman scribe who was indulging in 'blaming the Christians,' it is possible that such material would have been limited to the descriptions of the persecution itself, and that Severus is drawing only from that limited a version, not yet containing the reference to "*Christus*." Other observations about the two texts would indicate that Severus is drawing from a source, likely a copy of Tacitus, and not creating the scene himself.

One of those observations concerns Severus' remark that Nero was at Antium when the fire started. Neither Suetonius nor Cassius Dio provides this bit of information in their accounts of the fire. There would seem to be no source for it other than Tacitus, although other histories written in the early centuries have not survived. And it is highly unlikely that Christian circles would have preserved this tidbit themselves. Thus, we have here the first indicator of the existence of Tacitus' *Annals* prior to the 15th century, when a manuscript was 'rediscovered' in Italy, one apparently copied in the 11th century from a now-lost predecessor.²⁴⁰

Severus' remarks that Nero was rumored to have caused the fire in order to rebuild a more glorious city, together with the fact that he could not lay such accusations to rest, are not specific to Tacitus and could be from some other history or general tradition. The remainder of Severus' account is devoted to the tortures and deaths inflicted on the Christians. These, too, could have been derived from some Christian creation or, as suggested above, from a Roman insertion into Tacitus embodying the first accusation that Christians had been responsible for the fire. Or perhaps it was written by Severus himself. Any of these options would have been building on the evolving concept that, as the Christians had come to be regarded as the cause of disasters big and small, a great slaughter after the fire for which they were now held responsible came to be added to their catalogue of martyrologies.

That said, perhaps the most likely of the available options is that Severus was drawing on an *Annals* passage which contained the point about Nero in Antium as well as the accusations against the emperor (although the wording of Severus is not the same as in Tacitus). And, if no prior Roman insertion about Christian responsibility could be read there, Severus added a (post-Eusebius) Christian text—or his own—about the martyrdom which allegedly followed the fire, reflecting a now established "blame the Christians" outlook that had been embraced by Christians themselves.

In the latter case (no previous Roman insertion), that added dimension, probably taken from Severus himself, was later inserted into the actual text of the *Annals*, a quite natural procedure once the preservation of Roman and Greek texts fell into the exclusive hands of Christian copyists. And perhaps it was at that time that the phrase about Christ being executed by Pilate was added.

Is it feasible to think that Severus would splice together Roman and Christian sources? Yet this is precisely what he did in the previous chapter (28). In conjunction with remarks about Nero's abominable character and cruelties during his reign, he recounts that "Peter was there [in Rome] executing the office of bishop, and Paul too..." which is drawing exclusively from Christian sources and legends. He even includes the "celebrated encounter of Peter and Paul with Simon [Magus]," describing the latter's magical flight into the air borne by demons and his fall to earth at the prayers of the apostles.

The presence of the martyrdom material in Severus, regardless of how we see it arriving there, speaks to the fascination the subject held for Christians, which emphasizes the perplexity of the void found about it in the preceding three centuries. Taking the entire picture into account, we are faced with a reasonable scenario that the Tacitean *Annals* existed in those first few centuries, but at least for a time contained only an account of the fire and Nero's role in it, and nothing about Christians as persecuted arsonists. This would explain Christian failure to draw upon it as a prime illustration of their history of martyrdom, as well as the failure of subsequent Roman historians to mention the same as well.

As the reader will have noted, the sum total of what I have proposed contains alternate elements within larger scenarios, and not all could be expected to be accurate. There are a few of "either this" or "either that" or "maybe another thing" in the mix, all being possible but obviously not all compatible. It is not my intention to declare one set of possibilities as the winning choice for historical actuality, but to highlight how alternate circumstances are quite feasible, and the pointers to them. (If I were led to choose, I would probably regard the evidence as persuasive that Tacitus made no reference to Christ or Christians, and that no Neronian persecution took place.) The ultimate purpose is not to 'prove' one specific alternative to trusting the Tacitus passage, but to demonstrate that the orthodox impulse to take so-called witnesses like him as strong evidence for an historical Jesus rests on ground that is far less secure than it would like to think.

Tacitus' Bottom Line

We have thus arrived at the crux of the entire argument. If no evidence can be supplied that Christians until the time of Sulpicius Severus 'knew' of a great persecution by Nero as arsonists of the fire, and there are many telling pieces of evidence against it, what does this say for the scene in the *Annals*? The compelling conclusion is that, as it stands, it is historically erroneous, and very much so. Even if the evidence collected in Christian documents points to the possibility of some mild measure or antagonism on Nero's part against the Christian community in the Rome of his day, then in such a case, if we are to

rescue authorship of 15:44 by Tacitus, we would have to acknowledge that the historian got it quite wrong. He would have created out of a minor event a vast exaggeration in scope and intensity, perhaps confusing something that took place around the time of the fire as something which was intimately involved with it the very cause of the conflagration itself, leading to a bloodbath unparalleled in any Roman domestic event ever recorded—and no Christians became aware of for over three centuries, overlooking such an account even in Tacitus.

But is this really feasible? The *Annals* were written only five decades after the fact. Tacitus may not have been a 'careful historian' to the extent that is often made of him, but he did have available to him good and multiple sources. (And he was about 8 years old when the fire occurred, though he may not at that time have been living in Rome.) Much of the rest of his text shows him to be one of the most reliable historians of his age, with two feet on the ground. How could he have gotten a relatively simple matter like this so wrong? If he could make such a mistake in regard to Nero and the Christians, we could expect his works to be riddled with other mistakes, and he would hardly have gained the reputation he has among both ancients and moderns. If *no* event took place under Nero, and Christians were simply imagining that Nero was the first persecutor—perhaps building on the legendary martyrdoms of Peter and Paul, or for reasons like those offered earlier, such as political interest or because *Nero redivivus* became associated with the Antichrist—then Tacitus has simply invented the whole thing, for reasons or through error which we can scarcely understand or identify. This seems even less feasible.

Either way, the reliability of 15:44 cannot be rescued. With the fundamental accuracy or authenticity of its central feature, the persecution of the Roman Christians for the fire, so undermined or discredited, there is no way to salvage its accompanying feature, the reference to "*Christus*" as executed by Pontius Pilate. And thus the secure lifeline which Tacitus is claimed to have thrown to those foundering in a sea of doubt and lack of evidence for the existence of an historical Jesus has been severed and washed away.

3. The Devil in the Details

Many have been the particular objections raised to regarding the passage on the Christians and their persecution as authentic to Tacitus, some going back centuries. Not all of them merit attention, but there are a few that do.

Dubious Language

The language of this passage is regarded as gross and sensationalist, something out of sync with Tacitus' usual terse and classic style. It also clashes with the treatment Tacitus has just accorded to Nero, refusing to commit to the rumor that he had set the fire and focusing on the emperor's concerns for the city and the welfare of the people, even turning over his own private grounds to shelter the homeless. For the succeeding atrocities committed against the Christians he has been turned into a mad dog.

On the other hand, it is regularly claimed (e.g., by Meier, *op.cit.*, p.90) that no Christian interpolator into Tacitus would have used such phrases as "a pernicious superstition," "a class of men loathed for their vices," or the accusation that they held a "hatred of the human race." (All these phrases do not appear in Sulpicius Severus, but if he were drawing on a copy of Tacitus which contained them, he would likely have left them out due to Christian sensitivity.) And yet, a forger could conceivably have introduced them for effect and to create an impression of authenticity. In fact, the very extremity of the language could be said to work *against* authenticity, for it has been asked what would have led Tacitus to hold and express such vicious animosity toward the Christians as a faith group. To put it a more precise way, why would he represent the Romans as, prior to the fire, holding such views toward the Christians? It is extremely doubtful that by 64 CE the Christians had reached such a high profile that they could be "hated for their abominations." And just what were those "abominations"? While the later expansion of Christianity and its pretensions did in fact lead to such a reaction, we can see no such state of affairs existing in Nero's time, when Christians were barely distinguished from Jews in general.²⁴¹

An interpolator of those sentiments might have chosen to temper them by having Tacitus step out of the character he has created and acknowledge that the crowd felt some pity at the victims' extreme sufferings (a not uncommon theme in Christian martyrologies), and even intimate that the real reason Nero subjected them to their punishment was to satisfy his urge to cruelty, not because they deserved it. Such pagan acknowledgement of Christian innocence was another common martyrology theme, and can be observed in the New Testament, as in Pilate's declaration that "I find no blame in this man," and Agrippa's judgment concerning Paul in Acts 26:31, "This man is doing nothing worthy of death or imprisonment." An interpolator may also have gotten in a 'dig' at Rome itself by having Tacitus say that the capital was "where all things horrible or shameful in the world collect and find a vogue," although Tacitus, with his sardonic view of society, might have been quite capable of the remark.

On the other hand, we have looked at the possibility that the first insertion into Tacitus was by a Roman who acted on the practice of blaming the Christians for every disaster, as witnessed to by Tertullian and the forger of the Paul and Seneca letters. Such derogatory remarks from his pen would be completely understandable. Later generations of Christian scribes would have accepted those remarks as authentic and seen them as a testimonial to the sufferings and calumny they had endured in their early history, leading them to make no excisions to the Tacitus manuscripts.

A Missing Resurrection

Some suggest that if Tacitus had known anything about the Christian faith, and was at all concerned with criticizing or ridiculing the sect (he did chastise the Jews), he would have mentioned the reputed resurrection of Christ. On the other hand, if it was a Christian fabrication, why was some reference to the resurrection not worked into the passage, as one sees in the *Testimonium*? If an

interpolated passage could contain an historical note on the crucifixion—why not one on the resurrection as well? That alleged historical note, by the way, is the only mention in pagan writings of the death of Jesus under Pontius Pilate—indeed, it is the only mention of Pilate himself. Quite apart from the attraction of the *Annals'* passage to Christian writers for the history of persecution and martyrdom, we should expect it to have been noted, valued and mentioned by later writers simply on the basis of that little detail of Jesus' execution by Pilate.

"Christians" vs "Chrestians" and a possible meaning for "Chrestianos"

One of the most serious objections is that the term "Christians" was not current as early as the 60s of the 1st century, not even among Christians. As noted earlier, it does not appear anywhere in pagan writings, nor even in early Christians ones before 1 Peter 4:16, usually dated in the 80s. It is not even used by the Gospel writers—who were quite capable of anachronisms. (The statement in Acts 11:26, that Christians were first so-named in Antioch in the time of Paul, cannot be trusted, since it is not supported in Paul and was written the better part of a century later.) This renders suspicious the statement in the *Annals* passage that (in the time of Nero, the early 60s) the "crowd" styled this "class of men" as "Christians." Moreover, Tacitus refers to these Christians as a "vast multitude," and this does not fit most scholarly calculations of the spread and numbers of Christians for that early a period. While estimates have varied, to place vast numbers in Rome itself in the time of Nero would be scarcely supportable.

There is another problem regarding the term "Christians," for this does not seem to have been the actual word used. The earliest surviving manuscript containing *Annals* 15:44 originally showed the term "*Chrestianos*," subsequently altered to "*Christianos*." Examination by ultraviolet photograph clearly shows that an "e" has been erased and the resulting space only partially filled in by a substitute "i," although it cannot be said by whom or at what time the change was made. In any case, we can assume that the original scribe who produced this manuscript from an earlier copy found an "e" in it, since it is highly unlikely that he would have made a reading mistake and put an "e" where an "i" was found, substituting an unnatural form of the word in place of a more familiar one. Either he or a later scribe felt that, whatever earlier manuscripts said, "*Christianos*" was the proper form and so it ought to be changed.

Eddy and Boyd admit (p. 180, n.44) that "The latter [Chrestians] is found in the earliest available manuscript and almost certainly reflects the original." They are drawing here on Van Voorst (*op.cit.*, p.43) who points to a 'correction' made in the margin. But the latter is dubious. First, the margin note is "*Christiani*" which as a correction would be in the wrong grammatical form, since it would need to have been "*Christianos*." Second, the margin note was almost certainly meant as a 'bookmark,' a notification in the margin (where it could be clearly seen) pointing to the location of the subject of "*Christiani*" in the text. This is confirmed by a margin note directly above it reading "Nero," which is not a correction of anything but another bookmark locating the subject of Nero in the text.

Both Drews and Meier present an interesting observation. The word "Chrestian" literally means "the good" (from "*chrestus*," meaning good). If the populace called a group who were "hated for their vices" by this name, they had to be using it ironically. We must first ask if in fact such an ironic use would be likely. There could be an explanation supporting this. It seems to be the case that in early times the words "Chrestians" and "Christians" were to a great extent interchangeable, particularly since they both enjoyed virtually the same pronunciation. This interchangeability was apparently common among both pagans and Christians, although from the late 2nd century on Christian writers like Tertullian were frequently criticizing the use of the term "Chrestians" for Christians. Christians so calling themselves may have been interpreted by the populace as referring to themselves as "the good," or else the inherent pun was recognized; and so the people gave them that ironic name, even though they were looked upon as anything but "good." (Again, however, it remains uncertain that either term was used as a self-referent as early as the reign of Nero, although such a practice in the time of Tacitus could have been read back into the past.)

Van Voorst (*op.cit.*, p.44) and others have suggested that Tacitus, following his statement that the crowd called them "*Chrestianos*," immediately corrected this 'mistake' by referring to their founder as "*Christos*" (not "*Chrestos*") and stating that he was the origin of their name. This seems overly subtle. If Tacitus' intention was to correct the crowd's nomenclature, he could have made this clearer. Or, he could simply have changed the previous word to "*Christianos*" with no comment. The subtlety of progressing without explanation from "*Chrestianos*" to "*Christus*" as a method of correcting the crowd's appellation would hardly have been something that would be comprehended by the reader. Why, then, would Tacitus have allowed the contradiction in spelling to stand? (If he could write "*Christus*," then he knew the correct form. And there is no evidence that the "*Christus*" in 15:44 ever read "*Chrestus*.")

The most natural solution is that for Tacitus no contradictions stood there, since he did not write one or both of those clauses. And rather than think that such discrepancies stood in the text throughout many centuries, this should be taken as an indicator that in fact the two clauses did not appear together in the original text or for much of the time afterward. While it is always possible that the "*Chrestianos*" lurking behind our earliest manuscript was simply a scribal error made sometime prior to it, the likelihood is greater that the reference to "*Christus*" as a man executed by Pilate is an interpolation inserted into the text at a later stage, and the discrepancy with the preceding "*Chrestianos*"—whether authentic or an earlier insertion—was for a time overlooked or ignored. (That later stage could well have been post-Severus, as one explanation for why the "*Christus*" clause does not appear in Sulpicius Severus' text.)

Could "Chrestianos" refer to Jewish Messianist Agitators?

If we were to presume that the original form of the word was "*Chrestianos*," this opens a different can of worms. If the clause containing it was interpolated, we can assume it referred to Christians, at a time when the two spellings were

still interchangeable, or at least acceptable to some. But if it was authentic to Tacitus, can we be sure that the term "*Chrestianos*" must have referred to the Christians? Drews suggests (*op.cit.*, p.54) that

Possibly the name is only another expression for Messianists, and the Chrestians of Tacitus are Jews exalted by eschatological ideas, living in expectation of a speedy end of the world by fire, and so contracting the suspicion of having set fire to the city.

Such Jews could even have been seen as a "multitude" and their apocalyptic views as "hatred of the human race." Jews of a messianic bent could have been referred to by a term related to the "*Christos*" (Anointed/Messiah) of Jewish expectation, with it, too, corrupted to the alternate "*Chrest-*" form. (Tacitus may have been aware that they were called "*Christiani*" but it was the crowd that ironically called them "*Chrestiani*," which is what Tacitus is telling his readers.) Certainly, the Jews were regarded as troublemakers and were generally detested in Rome, even occasionally expelled. We will see in the next section that Suetonius witnesses to such an expulsion of Jews under Claudius for some kind of agitation involving a person or entity called "*Chrestus*." Jewish apocalyptic anticipation in Rome, and a fixation on the world's end by fire, may have been provocative enough for Nero and the populace to accuse them of arson.²⁴³

Do we have any evidence pointing toward this scenario? In his *Chronicle*, Sulpicius Severus, in the chapter (30) following the one containing his Neronian persecution passage, makes a statement entailing a group called "*Christiani*." Speaking of the decision undertaken by Titus as to whether to destroy the Temple in Jerusalem after the city's capture, Severus says:

Others and Titus himself thought that the temple ought specially to be overthrown, in order that the religion of the Jews and of the Christians might more thoroughly be subverted; for that these religions, although contrary to each other, had nevertheless proceeded from the same authors; that the Christians had sprung up from among the Jews, and that if the root were extirpated, the offshoot would speedily perish.

It is difficult to determine, being as late as the end of the 4th century, where Severus got this. It has inherent problems. If there is any basis to it, it is anything but sure that we could identify these *Christiani* with our traditional "Christians." There is no evidence that Christians were involved in the Jewish War in defense of Jerusalem, and certainly not to any extent that would allow Titus to be aware of them and feel a need to "extirpate" the sect along with the 'normative' Jewish religion. Despite Christian tradition (which is less than definitive itself on the matter), there is no evidence that Christians were a notable presence in Jerusalem at the time of the War. In regard to the sects of "Christians" we know of in the mid-1st century, the Pauline cult and the Galilean Kingdom preaching movement, neither one would have had any interest in getting involved in defense of the Temple. In any case, even though it is conceivable that the Roman leadership had gained some detailed knowledge of the niceties between various Jewish

religious expressions, it does not seem justified to think that as early as the year 70 such knowledge of those expressions would encompass the small and obscure elements that were yet to combine into Christianity.

However, it would be more feasible to consider taking Severus' reference as ultimately derived from a group of "*Chri/estiani*," meaning Jewish messianists, such as could have appeared in Tacitus. (Severus would have assumed, whatever his source, that they referred to his own Christians and changed the term.) In this case, the "*Chrestianos*" of *Annals* 15:44 would have some feasibility as being a reference to a Jewish messianic group.

This the Roman leadership could have become sufficiently familiar with as a thread of Jewish sectarian thinking, one not in keeping with the official outlook of the Jewish establishment. It could then represent, for Titus, the body of Zealot extremists who were at the heart of the Jewish revolt and defense of Jerusalem, a 'branch' that would especially have to be rooted out. At the same time, Judaism itself had to be overthrown, because it was the fountainhead of the problem, the religio-ethnic entity that had caused so many troubles for the empire with its stubborn and exclusive monotheism and its long resistance to integration.

This, of course, would not make such "*Chri/estiani*" in Judea during the War identical with a messianic community in Rome who a few years earlier were accused by Nero of setting the fire. But they could, from a Roman vantage point, be seen as different parts of a prevalent Jewish expression which had set itself as enemy to Rome's overlordship and worked toward its failure. Tacitus may have seen them both as encompassed by the term "*Chri/estiani*" (however that term may have arisen) embodying the idea of a "Christos/Messiah."

Thus we have another alternative scenario for this passage, a possible meaning of "*Chrestianos*" in *Annals* 15:44, given an assumption that it was there from the beginning. If they were Jewish messianic agitators, the crowd could well have loathed them and called them haters of the human race, willing to regard them as incendiaries. In this case, the reference would be authentic to Tacitus, leaving only the statement about a founder "Christ" executed by Pontius Pilate to be seen as a much later interpolation, by a Christian scribe who merely *understood* these "*Chrestianos*" as referring to Christians. For a time, then, no tradition about Christians setting the fire and being punished for it by Nero would arise in the Christian (or pagan) community, as long as the Tacitus reference—if Christians even knew of it—was seen as referring to messianic Jews. (We could also note that this would be compatible with Suetonius' description of "*Chrestus*" as a Jewish agitator whose activities led to the Jews' expulsion from Rome by Claudius in 49.)

In the scenario being explored here, this would give us an original text reading from "[Nero accused] a class of men, loathed for their vices, whom the crowd styled Chrestians..." directly into "First, then, the confessed members of the sect were arrested." None of it, of course, would have referred to Christians.

And what do we find when we compare that with Sulpicius Severus? Keep in mind that a text suffering interpolation does not automatically or overnight

convert into similar insertions in every existing copy, sometimes not for a considerable time, if at all. So while an interpolated text may eventually have become the ancestor of our extant ones, Severus, still relatively early at the end of the 4th century, may have been using an undoctored manuscript of the *Annals*. Once we delete the reference in 15:44 to *Christus* and the 'history' of his sect as an interpolation, this is the exact material we find in Severus. As noted earlier, his *Chronicle* passage includes none of the material on Christ crucified by Pilate or the 'pernicious superstition' being checked and then breaking out again. He jumps over that, saying:

"[Nero] therefore turned the accusation against the Christians [changed from 'Chrestians'], and the most cruel tortures were accordingly inflicted upon the innocent" [with "innocent" being Sulpicius' editorial contribution].

Aside from the word "Christians" (reflecting Severus' understanding) none of the material presently in his text points to an original which presented Christ or the Christian sect as the culprits accused of and punished for the fire.

This postulated scenario possesses its own coherence, but as we have seen, there are other possible scenarios drawing on other facets of the evidence and using different interpretations and deductions. Given the state of the overall record, this is perhaps not surprising.

The Christ Connection

There remains one perplexing statement that has hitherto defied coherent explanation, no matter what the scenario brought to the passage as a whole. As part of the sentence that "*Christus*" was put to death by the procurator Pontius Pilate, the extant text adds a curious observation (in bold):

Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of the procurator Pontius Pilate, **and a pernicious superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular.**

There seems to be no obvious way to separate this from the statement of Christ's execution by Pilate, out of which it seems to follow (the superstition was checked by *Christus*' crucifixion), at least without postulating some extensive reworking of an original text we cannot hope to recover. If it is all assigned to Tacitus, it is rather obscure as to what he could have had in mind by apparently calling Jesus' ministry and the discipleship that followed him during his life—something he would hardly have had any specific knowledge of—a "pernicious superstition," which "broke out again" in both Judea and Rome. Nor does it work all that well if we presume he is talking of the general subject of Jewish messianism, since one would think he would hardly have restricted this to Jesus and his following, and thus would not likely have said it was checked for a time by Jesus' death.

If we choose instead to assign the statement to a Christian interpolator, we face the familiar problem—discussed above—of accepting that a Christian scribe would include phrases like "pernicious superstition" and Judea as the "first source of the evil." Although, as part of that discussion, it was also considered that putting those phrases onto the pen of a Christian was not totally out of the question. If the text is read in its most straightforward way, it is saying that the "superstition" represented by Jesus' ministry and his following was checked by his death, but was revived afterwards, presumably in terms of the rise of the Christian movement in his name, something that happened in both Judea and Rome. Such an idea would be best identified as coming from the viewpoint of a Christian, supporting the interpolation of the entire "*Christus*" reference as quoted just above. Along with the derogatory language against his own religion which he included for effect, the interpolator also worked in some compensatory derogation against Rome itself.

Perhaps the interpolator was also responsible for the entire account of the persecution of the "*Chrestianos*" as arsonists of the fire. But what of the option discussed earlier that a Roman scribe was the first interpolator, inserting anti-Christian material (but not including the above quote) about the fire and resulting persecution on the basis of the popular attitude which held that Christians were responsible for every misfortune that occurred? This would have preceded the interpolation (by a Christian) of the above "*Christus*" material, the latter either before or after Sulpicius Severus.

This is not particularly problematic either way. If Severus was drawing on a Tacitus manuscript containing the "*Christus*" elements interpolated by an earlier Christian, he could simply have cut them out in adapting the passage to his *Chronicle*. It is even possible that our postulated Roman interpolator could have been responsible for those elements, since this would have been at a time much later than Tacitus, when it is feasible that such a Roman could indeed have presented Christianity as a pernicious superstition that was checked by Jesus' death but revived afterwards; nor would he have felt a need to explain "*Christus*" any further for readers of Tacitus, since by that time (perhaps 3rd or 4th century), most of Roman society should have known who this was, with the term being treated as a name.

It may be that no automatic or ideal solution to the "pernicious superstition checked for a time" presents itself, but that includes regarding the whole passage as genuine to Tacitus. There are so many combinations of possibilities which offer themselves for consideration, it is difficult to judge what might be the most workable selection. Indeed, it would be foolhardy for anyone to try to declare one particular scenario for the 15:44 passage as a whole to be either flawless or logically conclusive, given the range of textual factors and different possibilities that need to be taken into account in the very complex mix of features in and around this notorious chapter of the *Annals*. The reader's patience has been tried, I am sure, by the confusing multiplicity of alternatives presented here, not all of which, of course, can be fitted into a single working scenario. Choices have to be

made. But what all of this has demonstrated is that the reference to Christ in Tacitus is anything but secure and reliable in giving support to the existence of Jesus. Indeed, the sheer weight of so many questions and difficulties involved with it, as well as the weight of the arguments for interpolation, should compel us to set it aside as having no determinable probative value at all.

II: SUETONIUS

In the previous section on Tacitus, it was noted that Suetonius, writing only a few years after his fellow historian, made a reference to "*Christiani*" in his *Life of Nero* (16.2), a short and enigmatic statement that "Punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition." No connection was made with the fire, nor was there mention of Christians being accused of setting it, let alone any details about the nature of the 'punishment.' (Some would say that the vocabulary implies execution, but this is not certain.) It was noted that if the persecution following the fire were the context, Suetonius' reference would be quite anomalous when set alongside the other relatively innocuous "abuses" and the measures Nero took against them. There was even some reason to consider the possibility of interpolation. We will keep this terse reference in mind in examining Suetonius' equally terse and elusive—but more famous—reference in his *Life of Claudius*:

Iudaeos impulsore Chresto assidue tumultuantis Roma expulit.

The Jews, being constantly in an uproar due to the instigator *Chrestus*, he (Claudius) expelled from Rome. [25:4]

Taking this statement at face value, there are several things to notice:

- (1) It is the Jews who are said to be expelled from Rome, not Christians.
- (2) Those Jews have been in a constant uproar.
- (3) The "instigator" is a person and he seems to have been on the scene.
- (4) This instigator's name is "*Chrestus*," not "*Christus*" (Christ).

Although usually acknowledging a degree of uncertainty, New Testament scholars have long interpreted this statement as a reference to Christ and the Christians. (There are no good arguments for Christian interpolation and a few against, and so such a scenario will be left out of the discussion.) It is argued that to most pagans in Claudian Rome, Christians could have been indistinguishable from Jews, and their founder "Christ" easily mistaken for someone named "*Chrestus*." Perhaps so, but Suetonius himself, in the year 120, should have been able to distinguish them, and if by "*Chrestus*" he meant to refer to the "Christ" of the Christians, then even if he were using an earlier source which got the name wrong, a good historian would have corrected the matter. Besides, the reference to "*Christiani*" in his *Life of Nero*, assuming authenticity, would show that he was familiar with them and with the proper term.

It was noted in the section on Tacitus that there was virtually no difference in pronunciation between "*Chrestiani*" and "*Christiani*" and that an interchanging

of the two forms took place among both pagans and Christians, although we have witness to this only after the middle of the 2nd century. While Suetonius a few decades earlier could conceivably have confused "*Christus*" and "*Chrestus*" on the basis of a mishearing, this would be in conjunction (a double whammy) with confusing Christians with Jews, since it is the latter to whom he assigns his "*Chrestus*." In fact, in *Nero* he says that the former are a "new superstition," so he could not associate them with Jews in general who were an ancient race and religion. By the beginning of the third decade of the 2nd century, a confusion between Christians and Jews should no longer have been possible.²⁴⁴

Moreover, this good historian should not, in his choice of language, have created the clear impression that "*Chrestus*" was a figure on the scene in Rome. (The word "*impulsore*" means "instigator" as a person, not "instigation," making the usual translation of "at the instigation of *Chrestus*" somewhat misleading.) If he understood anything about the Christians, a blunder such as placing their founder in Rome two decades after his death should also not have been possible. If he had read an 'authentic' Tacitus 15:44, he would have known that such a death had occurred at the hands of Pontius Pilate, whose career in Judea ended several years before Claudius' accession. If he was trusting in an earlier source, that source—even closer to the scene—would have been the one to make the blunder, something probably even less likely.

Uproarious Christians

Christians in Rome being "constantly in an uproar" is an unlikely eventuality, as is their expulsion from the city on their own account. Such things are not witnessed to anywhere else. Consider Paul's letter to the Romans, written less than a decade after these reputed events. He sends "greetings to all of you in Rome whom God loves...Grace and peace to you" (1:7). In the final chapter, he sends greetings to individuals and admonishes: "Keep your eye on those who stir up quarrels and lead others astray," the latter obviously being a reference to disputes within the community itself, not city-wide disturbances in conflict with other parts of society. There is no suggestion by Paul that the Roman Christians have recently been embroiled in large-scale tumults, with Jews or anyone else, leading to the expulsion of the community from Rome. If such were the case, Paul would have been concerned for the safety and whereabouts of many of those friends he addresses.

Two of the friends he mentions are Aquila and Priscilla. In Acts 18:2 Aquila is identified as "a Jew," one "recently arrived from Italy because Claudius had issued an edit that all Jews should leave Rome." In a document written almost a century after the fact, we cannot be confident of the accuracy of the traditions contained here, nor do we know what source (if not simply oral tradition) was being drawn on. But taken at face value, the text of this passage implies that Aquila and Priscilla were not yet Christians; Paul, frequenting synagogues in his first arrival in a city (according to Acts—although this does not square with Paul's own letters), could well have converted this Jewish couple subsequent to

their meeting. In any case, while we cannot place too close a trust in the details of Acts 18, it is sufficient to point out that this account gives no support to the idea of *Christians* causing trouble in the city of Rome leading to an expulsion of all Jews, although it is feasible that some Christians may have been caught up in a forced exodus of Jews brought about by the Jews themselves, the former perhaps being indistinguishable from the latter by the authorities.

Nor does any other Roman historian, including Tacitus and Cassius Dio, mention that "Christians" caused so much trouble for Claudius that they were ejected from Rome, even as part of a larger Jewish contingent. (And neither, for that matter, does Josephus.) The fact that Tacitus, especially if we assume he was the author of the *Annals* passage which devotes so much attention to Christians, had nothing to say about troublemaking Christians and their founder in the time of Claudius, undercuts any claim that Suetonius was speaking of Christians.

Moreover, if we were to assume that the event in Suetonius concerned the Christians, we would face a number of incongruities. The Christian community in Rome was hardly a large group as early as 49. How big an uproar could they create, let alone engage in "constantly"? Simply preaching the Christ is not likely to have set the whole city in a turmoil (although Claudius was anxious to keep a lid on religious proselytizing). Nor should the authorities have been led to hold the entire Jewish population of the city responsible and go so far as to expel them all. The Jews themselves would never have allowed that to happen, since an explanation by them to the emperor would soon have set matters right, that these upstarts—many being gentiles—who believed that a recent man was God (or, in the mythicist view, who believed in a spiritual Son of God as against strict Jewish monotheism) should not be identified with Jewry in general and not bring the boot down on all of them.

Uproarious Jews

Consequently, it makes much better sense to regard the uproar as involving the Jews, as stated. When a large group of people (Dio reports that the Jews were increasing in number, a "multitude") is stirred up by an agitator or by a religious idea, the effects can be widespread and high profile. We also have reason to think that Claudius' patience by this time was wearing thin. Dio reports (Bk. 60, 6.6-7) that several years earlier Claudius had been forced to lay a ban on Jewish gatherings. Getting involved in new agitations on account of "*Chrestus*" may have been the last straw, resulting in their expulsion.

Thus, all things considered, "the Jews" are not liable to be, for Suetonius, a misunderstanding of something relating to Christians. As noted, the reference in his *Life of Nero* to "*Christiani*," if authentic, would indicate he understood the difference. That degree of familiarity would also suggest that he would not have made the mistake of misunderstanding "*Christus*" as "*Chrestus*." While it is one thing to mis-hear something, it is another to put down in writing two different forms of the same basic word, which is what he would have done between the Nero passage and the Claudius passage, between "*Christiani*" and "*Chrestus*."

Robert Van Voorst (*op.cit.*, p.34), in considering the two passages, says that Suetonius "may not have associated Judaism with Christianity, much less have known that they were closely connected religious movements in the year 49." This seems to be an admission that a confusion between Christians and Jews in Roman eyes—which serves as a key part of so many arguments that the passage is a reference to Christians in agitation over Christ—was not likely. Van Voorst further suggests that Suetonius did not associate the "*Chrestus*" or the Claudius event with the "*Christian!*" of his Nero event. That would seem to be the case, though it would surely have been a natural association to make—or to want to investigate—leading us to conclude that Suetonius fully assumed that there was no such connection, simply because he knew he was not talking about Christians or Christ in the Claudius passage.

Identity of "*Chrestus*"

Who might "*Chrestus*" have been? It was a common name in Roman society, especially for slaves and freedmen. He may have been a popular Jewish leader who stirred up his contemporaries in some way, creating an uproar in the city. Van Voorst notes that some historians do take it this way (see p.32, n.36). One of these is R. T. France in his *The Evidence for Jesus* (p.40-2):

The simplest explanation is surely that he was a person otherwise unknown to history who had somehow achieved a position of influence in the Jewish community at Rome (about whose internal affairs at this period very little is known)....Communal riots involving Jews were not an uncommon occurrence in the Graeco-Roman world, and perhaps needed no explanation.

France raises a point which Van Voorst discusses at some length, namely that "*Chrestus*" is nowhere attested as a name given to Jews, despite considerable inscriptional records. Van Voorst admits this is an argument from silence but one that should be given some weight. Probably so, but it overlooks the fact that in Rome we can expect that there were considerable numbers of gentile converts to Judaism, the so-called "Godfearers." *Chrestus* could be one of these. Jews had no particular monopoly on demagoguery, and new converts always tend to be among the most eager and vociferous. It is also possible that *Chrestus* was an outsider, not part of the Jewish community, and that this "instigator" was stirring up trouble which the Jews were reacting *against*.

On the other hand, there is also the possibility that the reference is to some surge of messianic expectation among Jews, with the name "*Chrestus*" being a misunderstood form of "*Christus*" referring to the apocalyptic Messiah. In this case we would not need to postulate an actual human figure on the scene. Since the Messiah concept was not intimately understood by the Romans (Josephus would certainly not do anything to enlighten them in *his* writings), a turmoil among Jews involving the expectation of the "*Christus*" could be mistaken for a man supposedly behind the scenes directing some kind of revolutionary activity, something seen by the Romans as necessitating the drastic action of expelling a whole segment of the city's population. Josephus witnesses to a widespread

fever in Palestine, in the decades prior to the Jewish War, of messianic unrest and hopes for Roman overthrow. It is not difficult to imagine some kind of spillover into Italy itself which Suetonius is recording. This interpretation would be compatible with the alternate scenario for Tacitus discussed previously, that the *Annals* passage in regard to its "*Chrestianos*"—if the latter were authentic to Tacitus—was referring to Jewish messianists accused of setting the fire. The two historians refer to different periods, 49 and 64, but a common phenomenon of unrest among Jews could have been active during both.²⁴⁵

Van Voorst interprets things differently. Drawing on Louis H. Feldman (*Jew and Gentile*, p.300-4), he suggests that rather than any threat of revolutionary action, the Romans were reacting to aggressive Jewish missionary activity which was having a disturbing success winning over Roman citizens. (He notes a very early expulsion of Jews from Rome for that reason in 139 BCE, and he appeals to Dio's explanation for the expulsion of Jews by Tiberius in 19 CE.) Feldman carries this 'history' a step further by suggesting that in the case of Claudius' expulsion, it was a matter of *Christian* missionary preaching of Jesus as the Christ. Van Voorst remarks (p.37): "Suetonius may well be commenting about a civil unrest caused between Roman gentiles and Roman Jews by proclaiming Jesus as the Christ," with the result that members of both groups were expelled.

But the text itself provides little or no justification for this. If we assume, based on his Nero passage, that Suetonius understood the difference between the Jews and the Christians, he would hardly have restricted the cause of the turmoil to "the Jews." Some nuancing would have been in order. Van Voorst states: "Many interpreters of this passage assume that the civil disturbances were only among Jews, but Suetonius does not say this." But this amounts to *precisely* what he says. Besides, the preaching of a man executed in Judea in the past (something quite different from an expected future Messiah) should not have led him (or his source) to present a description which implied the presence on the scene of the preached figure himself as an "instigator." Again, if the Christians were the ones causing trouble in their preaching and the Jews were objecting to it, the latter could surely have made the case that it was the Christians who were the inciters and they themselves did not deserve expulsion along with them.

Sources

For some of the same reasons discussed in regard to Tacitus, we can assume that Suetonius did not derive a mistaken reading of "*Christus*" as "*Chrestus*" from the archives. Moreover, at some point he was barred from using them on account of some ill-advised behavior toward Hadrian's wife. Van Voorst points out that he makes no quotation of the imperial correspondence after his chapter on Augustus. But if any official information had been available that he could have drawn on, it would be gross incompetence on his part if he placed "Christ" as an instigator in Rome at the time of Claudius, which is the implication in his words. Nor can he have derived it from Christian hearsay, since Christians would hardly have labelled the event as something that happened to the Jews or implied

that Jesus was in Rome in 49. If he had used an older source, it is unlikely that this source, closer to the event, would have made any of those blunders. Van Voorst suggests "police reports." But all of this is in the service of an effort to understand the passage as a reference to Christians. If it is not, then the question of sources for an entirely Jewish event becomes irrelevant to our concerns.

Eddy and Boyd (*op.cit.*, p. 177) observe that Suetonius is speaking of an edict from a Roman official, and thus in all probability it "would have been recorded in official court documents." This is a good point, but it does not help their case. An "official court document" is the kind of source we would least expect to get things wrong or misleading. And if such a document existed, and it was correct, we would have Suetonius drawing from it information which indeed referred to a Jewish event and not to a Christian one. However, by this time, Suetonius may no longer have had access to official documents.

While all sorts of specific scenarios, designed to introduce the Christians and their Christ into this passage, are theoretically possible, none are free of the problems which would not be present if we simply took it at its face value.

Summary

We are inevitably led to the only feasible understanding for this enigmatic sentence. Suetonius was talking about Jews, not Christians, and he understood "*Chrestus*" to be a man's personal name, even if it were really a case of him misunderstanding a reference to the Jewish Messiah. On the other hand, if he had some familiarity with the Messiah concept, he would hardly have been led to give it the name of "*Chrestus*," meaning "Excellent One."

Again, in the year 120 Suetonius should have had some familiarity with the Christians and their Christ, even if imperfect. He would know at least enough to associate "*Chrestus*/*Christus*" with that group, and thus should not have lumped them indistinguishably and inseparably from the Jews, nor blithely accept that Claudius would have banished the entire body of Jewry from the city for the agitations of a minor sect, even if it had grown out of a Jewish heritage.²⁴⁶

As they are silent on Tacitus, so are the Christian commentators of the first few centuries on both passages in Suetonius, including Eusebius. (Tertullian, as we saw in the section on Tacitus, may allude to the *Nero* reference, and he, alone of early Christian commentators, shows knowledge of Suetonius on other topics.) Possibly Suetonius' works were not so well known, but if Christians did happen to read the line in *Life of Claudius*, they apparently felt there was no reason to make note of it, no doubt because it clearly stated that it was the Jews who were involved. They might have paused over "*Chrestus*," but since that was a common name and the passage implied that this *Chrestus* was in Rome at the time, they would simply have moved on.

A Christian 'Spin' on Suetonius

A good example of how Christian writers dealt with pagan texts is provided by one of the first to show knowledge of the "*Chrestus*" passage in Suetonius' *Life of Claudius*. Paulus Orosius was a student of Augustine in the early 5th

century. At the latter's request, and in response to pagan accusations that the adoption of Christianity was responsible for the old gods failing to prevent the barbarian sack of Rome in 410, he wrote an apologetic work to demonstrate that similar disasters had befallen the world long before Christianity came along. This was the *Historiarum Adversum Paganos*, the longest surviving account of the entire course of Roman history, from the founding of the city to the year 417.

In Book 7, chapter 6, verses 15-16, Orosius addresses the Suetonius passage:

In the ninth year of his rule, Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome, as Josephus relates. But Suetonius impresses me more, who puts it this way:

Claudius Iudaeos impulsore Christo assidue tumultuantis Roma expulif,

which, whether meaning that he ordered the Jews to be restrained and suppressed for their turbulence against Christ, or that he wanted the Christians to be expelled at the same time for being men of a related religion, cannot be discerned.

I have kept Orosius' quote from Suetonius in the Latin. With the addition of the name "Claudius," it is basically the same as our extant Suetonius. But his own understanding of it—and how that would be translated into English—would be determined by what he says following, and this would render it unlike any of the standard translations of the line in Suetonius. Orosius has forced a reading upon the sentence which is a Christian 'spin' on the matter.

First of all, he has changed "*Chresto*" to "*Christo*" to reflect the view that Suetonius is speaking of Christ, the natural Christian inclination (still operating today) to think that pagan observers must have been aware of Christ and ought to have mentioned him. But Orosius is unsure of exactly what should be read into Suetonius' sentence. It could be, he says, that the Jews are agitating over the preaching of Jesus by Christians (which is the way Feldman and Van Voorst have leaned), or that Christians were expelled on the Jews' coattails as being somehow associated with them in their agitation. Either way, the Jews' "uproar" and expulsion he takes as a response to the Christian movement, which preserves a Christian involvement in the event. And Orosius has ignored (as do most modern translators) the implication that the instigator is on the scene.

As we have seen, opinion in scholarship is divided as to whether Suetonius' reference in *Life of Claudius* refers to Christ and Christians or not. Van Voorst may have admitted (p.39) that "(Suetonius') glaring mistakes should caution us against placing too much weight on his evidence for Jesus or his significance for early Christianity," yet in summing up his chapter (p.72) he nevertheless lists Suetonius as among those who gave some "treatment" to Jesus. John P. Meier (*A Marginal Jew*, p.92) adopts a position on the fence.

So far, the "big three" of ancient witnesses have been shown to entail serious, even prohibitive, problems in serving as reliable evidence for the existence of an historical Jesus. They have also provided ample indication of the practice of Christian interpolation and reinterpretation, and the likelihood that, to at least some extent, such tampering has been in operation here.

III: PLINY THE YOUNGER

A scant half-decade before Tacitus published his *Annals*, his close friend Pliny wrote a letter to the emperor Trajan from his post as governor of the province of Bithynia on the northern coast of Asia Minor. The letter was an inquiry as to how to proceed with the prosecution of Christians in that province. Pliny had thus far allowed for denial and recantation, and if the accused had renounced Christian beliefs, "reviled the name of Christ" and made sacrifice to the state gods, including the emperor, he or she was acquitted; but if persistent, the Christian was sentenced to death, for "I am convinced that their stubbornness and unshakeable obstinacy ought not to go unpunished."

From those who had retracted their former allegiance to Christ, Pliny learned certain things about Christian practices:

They also declared that the sum total of their guilt or error amounted to no more than this: they had met regularly before dawn on a fixed day to chant verses alternately amongst themselves in honor of Christ as (if) to a god [*Christo quasi deo*], and also to bind themselves by oath, not for any criminal purpose, but to abstain from theft, robbery and adultery, to commit no breach of trust and not to deny a deposit when called upon to restore it. After this ceremony it had been their custom to disperse and reassemble later to take food of an ordinary, harmless kind... I found nothing but a degenerate sort of cult carried to extravagant lengths.

This would seem to indicate that Pliny had previously known very little about Christians, despite having been a prominent lawyer and public servant in Rome. The point has been made that it is difficult to believe that he could have known anything about Christians being accused of responsibility for the fire and a subsequent persecution by Nero, since such a dramatic tradition would not only have brought them into the ken of his knowledge, it should have influenced his judicial judgments about them. Neither he nor Trajan brings up the subject. In fact, to judge by Pliny's words and tone, he is almost led to believe that they are fairly innocuous, even adhering to commendable ethics.

The issue surrounding this letter is the question of what Pliny understands by "Christ." He does not use the name "Jesus" and gives no clear indication that he regards Christ as a man who had lived in recent times. Had he so understood things, it is difficult to conceive that he would not have referred to the object of the cult's worship in recognizably human terms. He can mention in considerable detail its ethical commitments, but he gives us no word about what should have been the most arresting of its features. In fact, Pliny has given himself the perfect opening when he sums up his description of the Christians: "I found nothing but a degenerate sort of cult carried to extravagant lengths." Surely one of those extravagances would have been their worship of a crucified man, and with the topic on the tip of his pen it is surprising that he did not point this out.

Pliny's phrase "reviled the name of Christ" is the language of the worship of divine and spiritual entities, not human beings. It would seem that whatever little

knowledge he already possessed, together with what he had learned from the accused, gave him to understand the Christian object of worship as a deity named "Christ." Even if that deity also possessed the name of "Jesus," this could have escaped him, whereas if the cult was based on an actual man whose name was Jesus, that information would more likely have come to his attention.

"*Christo quasi deo*"

The key phrase in elucidating Pliny's understanding of who or what "Christ" was is "*Christo quasi deo*," "Christ as (if) to a god." The problem lies in whether the "if" should be understood here, and what the ramifications are in either case. (Translators of Pliny are fairly evenly divided on whether to include "if.") Van Voorst (*op cit*, p.28) sums up the issue:

(Murray) Harris, following Goguel, argues that by using *quasi* Pliny means to say that the divine Christ whom Christians worship was once a human being (*Jesus as God*, p.346-7). As for Goguel, he argues that *quasi* "seems to indicate that, in Pliny's opinion, Christ was not a god like those which other men worship," because, Goguel suggests, "he had lived upon the earth."

This is a lot to derive from a single word, especially when accompanied by a complete absence of any remarks on Pliny's part to suggest he held such a view. On the other side of the language coin, Van Voorst goes on:

Sherwin-White points out that in Pliny "*quasi* is used commonly without the idea of supposal," to mean simply "as" (A. N. Sherwin-White, *Fifty Letters of Pliny*, p. 177).

Van Voorst qualifies this admission, adding a qualifier to his qualifier:

However, Pliny can also use *quasi* in its typically hypothetical meaning ("as if, as though"). So while "as if" *may* imply here that the Christ Christians worship was once a man, we should not place too much weight on this.

Here are a few illustrations of the two different usages of *quasi* in Pliny's letters.²⁴⁷

But I am arguing on this point as if I invited the whole populace to my reading room [*quasi populum in auditorium*] and not merely a few friends to my private chamber. [Book V, Letter 8]

Here we have a supposal meaning. Pliny has *not* invited the whole populace to his reading room, and so the idea is only 'supposed,' not actual.

For I am not such a perfect philosopher as to think it makes no difference whether I receive or not the approbation of others, which is itself a kind of reward [*quasipraemium*],... [Book V, Letter 1]

There is no supposal meaning here. The "approbation of others" *is* an actual reward in itself. An "if" would convey the meaning that it is not. Thus the *quasi* in this instance is not meant to convey such an idea. Here the English "kind of" is used to reflect Pliny saying in the *quasi* that it is a 'type' of reward.

But to be more concise, we need an example which directly compares one object with another:

For a speech (*oratio*) is the model for an indictment (*actio*, legal proceeding), one might call it (*quasi*) its archetype. [Book I, Letter 20]

Here the "*oratio*" is the archetype of the "*actio*," regardless of whether the word "archetype" is introduced by *quasi*. Again, the word is used to imply "type of" or "as we might say." The statement is not a supposal; it does not deny that the *oratio* is an archetype. While other uses of *quasi* comparing one thing with another do entail a denial, it is clear that this does not apply in all cases.

We therefore cannot say that "*Christo quasi deo*" contains any implication that for Pliny "*Christo*" is known *not* to have been a god, but a human man. And thus one is not justified in including an "if" in the translation in order to create that implication. "*Christo quasi deo*" can be translated "to Christ as to a god" or simply "to Christ as a god."

Moreover, the claim that "Christ as (if) a god" would imply that "Christ" was a man is belied by the language itself. The term "Christ" *per se* would not have equaled a known human being, and certainly not in the mind of a non-Christian. One could say, "Egyptians worshiped Alexander as if he were a god," since Alexander was known to be an historical man. But the term "Christ" would have had no such necessary meaning for Pliny, as his letter shows that he knew little about the sect. Had he known enough to be meaning this, and wanted to convey that a man was worshiped as a god, he would have used his name instead; the interrogations would certainly have told him that name and idea, and he would not have used the confusing term "Christ" with the emperor. The very fact that he did so would indicate that the Christians had not given him such information (the object of their worship having been a man), and that he was therefore referring to their object of worship as something *other* than a man. Thus, Pliny is actually indicating that the Bithynia Christians worshiped an entirely non-human figure. In other words, he provides evidence that there was no historical Jesus.

We do not know whether Pliny was familiar with the Jewish Messiah idea. By hearing of "*Christus*" from these Christians would he have associated it with that expected apocalyptic figure? In the event that he *was* familiar with it, such a "Christ/Messiah" was not an accepted divinity in anyone's eyes, Jew or pagan, and thus he could have been led to say something that meant: "these Christians worship the Jewish Messiah as (if) a god." (Then we need not be concerned whether the supposal idea is in mind or not.) Alternatively, even if by "Christ" Pliny did not understand the Jewish Messiah, the Christ of these Christians would have been an unfamiliar figure to the Greco-Roman pantheon, a new concept with a new name, and in that case he would have found it necessary to specify to Trajan that this "Christ" was to be identified as a god.

In either case, it means that Pliny would not be dealing with a straightforward idea, with a name and figure that would automatically be known as a divinity. That could be why he did not say simply, "to Christ as [*ut*] a god" or "to Christ their god," although either phrase would have done. It was not the same as

saying that Mithraists sang a hymn to Mithras their god. Everyone knew who Mithras was, that he belonged in the category 'god.' To say "to Mithras as a god" would be at best redundant, at worst faintly contradictory since it might convey the idea that it would be possible *not* to think of Mithras as a god. But not everyone, certainly not the emperor nor the average Roman, nor probably even Pliny himself before he talked to Christians, would understand "Christ" as a god. Thus the "*quasi*" would have provided a sense of identification of this Christian figure *as* a god, but with no supposal involved, since that is what he was and solely what he was.

Manuscript Witness

But there is another factor of uncertainty which needs to be introduced here. There are no surviving manuscripts of this letter, and the earliest witness to it we possess comes from the printed editions of the 16th century, which indicates that whatever manuscript source was used for that printing contained "*quasi*." But ancient Christian comments on the Pliny passage are anything but consistent with the extant phrase "*Christo quasi deo*." Tertullian, for example, when he discusses Pliny's letter in Apology 2, refers to the phrase as "*Christo et Deo*," that is, "Christ *and* God." An alternate reading in some manuscripts of the Apology have "*Christo ut Deo*," "Christ *as* God." The latter is also the reading in Jerome's *Chronicle*. Eusebius (*History of the Church* 3.33) quotes a Greek translation of Tertullian's Latin, as "*ton Christon theou diken*," which is literally, "Christ in the manner of God," suggesting an "*ut*" in the Latin being translated.

This does not guarantee that our "*quasi*" in Pliny is a corruption of a different original, but it does speak to uncertainty on the part of subsequent Christians as to what Pliny was saying—or what Christians *wanted* him to be saying. And it does leave us with the fact that the earliest witness to the "*quasi*" reading is in the printed version of the 16th century. We cannot rule out that the manuscript source of the latter contained a "*quasi*" which was a later amendment of an original "*et*" or "*ut*." The latter options are the only early witnesses we have to the phrase in question, with none witnessing "*quasi*." This further places arguments about what Pliny may have had in mind for "Christ" on shaky ground, since we cannot be absolutely sure that he wrote "*quasi*."

The Question of Authenticity

While it is not usually considered to be a likely factor, there are those who have seriously questioned the authenticity of this letter (and with it, the reply from Trajan). Unlike Tacitus, there would seem to be no easy way around its disparaging comments about Christianity. Could any Christian forger have written that it was "a degenerate cult," or have so readily admitted that many Christians would have been willing to recant their faith and revile the name of Christ? Would a Christian have been so opaque about Jesus, never even using his name? One wonders what a forger would think he was accomplishing by this type of fabrication. It would have been done during the 2nd century, since Tertullian discusses the letter and Trajan's reply in his Apology 2. Yet Pliny was

probably not someone whose works tended to be circulating in early Christian communities; unlike the case of Josephus, an important historian on the Jews and Judea, his letters would no doubt have held little interest for Christians.

At any rate, these are some of the problems perceived in the letter:

(1) Pliny says that "a great many individuals of every age and class, both men and women, are being brought to trial, and this is likely to continue. It is not only the towns, but villages and rural districts which are infected through contact with this wretched cult." This is regarded as too unrealistic. Could Christianity, in a relatively remote part of the empire, really have been this pervasive only a few years into the 2nd century? It goes far beyond scholarly estimates of Christianity's growth rate and presence at this time. But it gets worse:

(2) "People have begun to throng the temples which had been almost entirely deserted for a long time; the sacred rites which had been allowed to lapse are being performed again, and flesh of sacrificial victims is on sale everywhere, though up till recently scarcely anyone could be found to buy it." Even if Christians were as widespread as Pliny has previously implied, what he has gone on to say would equate this with almost the entire population, producing deserted temples and a virtual cessation of the traditional religious observances, with no purchases of sacrifices for them. This seems completely unreasonable. Yet why would Pliny be guilty of such a vast exaggeration? How could Christianity in Bithynia have been on such a juggernaut roll and yet at the same time be so low-key in Rome that Pliny seems to have brought with him little or no experience or knowledge of the movement?

(3) This letter comes from late in the period of Pliny's governorship. If Christianity had enjoyed such a devastating influx into Bithynian society, why did he wait so long to seek advice from the emperor?

(4) Pliny seems to contradict himself. He first pleads "ignorance" and the fact that he has "never been present at an examination of Christians," and so he does "not know the nature or the extent of the punishments meted out to them." But then he launches into an extensive account of what he has actually been doing: examinations, meting out of punishments, torturing slave-women to learn that it was "a degenerate sort of cult," and so on. This is the kind of inconsistency one finds familiar in interpolated or fabricated texts by Christians.

(5) Neither Christians nor Romans are recorded afterwards as referring to the easy-going policy on Christianity stated by Trajan in his reply to Pliny:

These people must not be hunted out...anyone who denies that he is a Christian is to be pardoned as a result of his repentance however suspect his past conduct may be...Pamphlets circulated anonymously must play no part in any accusation.

If this reflected an actual policy instituted by Trajan, we might expect later writers like Tertullian to make some appeal to it. In any case, such a policy looks suspicious attributed to an emperor who forbade even the formation of fire brigades as a potential danger for seditious gatherings; here Trajan seems unusually blase about any Christian threat. On the other hand, this as a forgery

could have been a Christian attempt to create a precedent for easy treatment and a live-and-let-live attitude (even if it could be couched only in terms of relapsed Christians). Again, though, one has to question the feasibility of Christians being able to use Pliny as a medium to fabricate and disseminate such a precedent.

(6) It has been pointed out that there are certain echoes of elements in the New Testament. Pliny's remarks that the temples were deserted and sacrificial animals no longer purchased is very similar to the episode in Acts 19:23-27 in which pagan craftsmen in Ephesus are lamenting that since Paul arrived on the scene, people have been led astray throughout the whole province of Asia, and their business in religious paraphernalia is suffering; worship of the goddess Diana has been in danger of drying up. Pliny's conduct in interrogation has similarities to that of Pilate interrogating Jesus; and his finding of no criminal activity on the part of Christians resembles Pilate's judgment that Jesus is innocent of any crime.

Perhaps none of these problems are individually insurmountable, but taken collectively they would seem to cast doubt on the reliability of the letter's authenticity. One has to wonder about the fact that, in case after case, no alleged witness to the historical Jesus regularly appealed to is free of serious difficulties, whether in regard to the meaning that may be drawn from it, or in regard to its authenticity. This lack of dependability will continue in the next chapter.

Summary

If the letter of Pliny is authentic, the bottom line becomes the same as that for Tacitus if authentic: Pliny witnesses to information which he has gleaned from Christians themselves, with no independent source of knowledge in sight.²⁴⁸ In Pliny's case, we are not even sure that his information relates to the worship of a perceived recent human man or simply of a spiritual Son of God. Since the arguments put forward suggest that the likelihood is of the latter, we may as a corollary turn back to Tacitus and ask: if this were the state of Christianity in Bithynia at the beginning of the 2nd century, how likely is it that in Rome belief in a human founder was well established?

On the other hand, it is possible that the capital was only now serving as a spearhead for belief in an historical Jesus and that remoter places like Bithynia lagged behind, and this is suggested by the epistle 1 Clement, apparently written from Rome not much more than a decade earlier (assuming its reliability on that score). A dozen years earlier than Pliny writes, Clement's community in Rome seems to have had no historical figure in its background. But if the line about "*Christus*" in the *Annals* is an insertion, and Josephus is to be set aside as entirely unreliable, we lack all usable witness by non-Christians to an historical Jesus before the second half of the 2nd century. As for Christians themselves, Ignatius may save the day and indicate the first stirrings of such a figure around the time of Tacitus and Pliny, but even that may have to be delayed a decade or two if the shorter 'authentic' versions of his epistles are to be questioned as feasibly being his personal product.

A Minor Trio: Thallus, Phlegon, Mara

I: Thallus and Phlegon

Thallus and Phlegon, two Roman historians ("chroniclers" might be a better term) about whom we know very little and whose works do not survive except in references by Christian commentators, are usually treated as a species of Siamese twins. Both are reputed to have had something to say about the darkness at the time of the crucifixion, though as we shall see this is undoubtedly a Christian spin on the matter, with both referring simply to an eclipse of the sun around that time. Phlegon is known to have written in the 140s, and while Thallus cannot be securely dated, the best conclusion is that he too wrote in the 2nd century. Since the sources for each of them occasionally overlap, particularly on the key question of the darkness, we will follow the favored twins approach.

Attestation and Dating of Thallus

Phlegon was a freedman of Hadrian which places him in the first part of the 2nd century. Attestations to Thallus begin only after the mid-2nd century. Brief mention of him as an historian of eastern affairs is found in Theophilus of Antioch (around 180), in Tertullian and Lactantius in the 3rd century, and in *Minucius Felix*. (Since I have defended the minority position that the latter work predated Tertullian's Apology rather than the other way around, Felix's mention, probably around 155, makes him the very earliest witness to the historian.) None of these Christian writers who mention Thallus say anything about a reference by him to Jesus or the darkness at the crucifixion, or to a connection made between Jesus' death and an eclipse. That begins only with Julius Africanus in the early 3rd century, presuming we can rely on the 9th century Georgius Syncellus to be accurately preserving Africanus' words, for the latter's works are lost. Eusebius in the 4th century, while referring to the recorded eclipse, does not mention Thallus specifically.

All the extant references to him do not elucidate for us exactly when Thallus wrote. His historical work is said to have ended at 109 BCE, though this stands in contradiction with his reported mention of a 1st century eclipse, most likely the one in 29 CE—as it would with his alleged mention of the darkness at the crucifixion. Since we see no sign of any *Christian* reaction to Gospel crucifixion elements before the 2nd century, a placement of Thallus in the mid-1st century (something many Christian scholars do, such as F. F. Bruce who dates his work at 55 CE) would make him not only the earliest witness to such Gospel elements,

but predating *Christian* reaction by over half a century and more. Since this strange a situation hardly seems likely, he should be judged as writing in the 2nd century, reacting to the Gospel story at the same time as everyone else.²⁴⁹

This, however, is based on the assumption that Thallus was indeed reacting to a Christian tradition about a darkness at Jesus' crucifixion; but if this is shown to be very unlikely, there would be no problem in dating Thallus to the 1st century, although we would still be faced with the attestation to him starting only after the mid 2nd century, with the eclipse interpreted by Christians as the darkness at the crucifixion coming even later. But the latter delay could be explained by the fact that Christians' own knowledge of the Gospel story begins in earnest only from the middle of the 2nd century, and thus they would not have been in a position to react sooner than that to Thallus' mention of an eclipse and put their own Gospel interpretation on it, even if he had written it a century earlier.

Thallus and Phlegon in Africanus in Syncellus

We can start with Julius Africanus. This Christian writer of the early 3rd century wrote a five-book *History of the World*, fragments of which appear in later commentators. One fragment, quoted in a *Chronicle* by Byzantine historian Georgius Syncellus writing around 800, refers to both Thallus and Phlegon. Here are the key parts of the first paragraph, with Africanus' words presumably accurately recorded by Syncellus six centuries later:

On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness; and the rocks were rent by an earthquake, and many places in Judea and the rest of the world were thrown down. **This darkness Thallus, in the third book of his *History*, calls, as appears to me without reason, an eclipse of the sun.** For the Hebrews celebrate the Passover on the 14th day according to the moon, and the passion of our Savior falls on the day before the Passover; but an eclipse of the sun takes place only when the moon comes under the sun...

To support this, as recorded by Syncellus, Africanus goes on to appeal to another source:

Phlegon records that, in the time of Tiberius Caesar, at full moon, there was a full eclipse of the sun from the sixth hour to the ninth—manifestly that one of which we speak [i.e., Phlegon, he says, must be recording the same astronomical event as Thallus], But what has an eclipse in common with an earthquake, the rending of rocks, and the resurrection of the dead, and so great a perturbation throughout the universe?...It was a darkness induced by God, because the Lord happened then to suffer.

Since everything referring to both Thallus and Phlegon seems to be put in Africanus' own words, with no direct quote, there is nothing here to tell us that either chronicler spoke of Jesus or the circumstances of his death. Both spoke of an eclipse—and using that word, since Africanus would have been unlikely to supply it otherwise, since he disagreed with it. We can also surmise that if either one of them *had* mentioned Jesus by name or the circumstances of his death,

Africanus would have mentioned this specifically. Thus, the connection drawn between Thallus and Phlegon's references to an eclipse and the event of Jesus' crucifixion has been entirely Africanus' own. (We will presently see that other witnesses render this certain.)

Even the sentence, "This darkness Thallus... calls an eclipse of the sun," does not have to mean that Thallus himself referred to both, as though *explaining* the darkness of Christian tradition as an eclipse of the sun. Africanus has just been speaking, on his own, about the fearful darkness over the whole of the world, as described in the Gospels. His words "this darkness" fit as a reference back to this, with Africanus linking it in his own mind to something which in Thallus constituted simply a report about an eclipse of the sun, with no association made by the chronicler to Jesus' crucifixion or its darkness. Africanus is offering his own opinion that Thallus, in describing the eclipse, was referring to the Gospel darkness—an error against reason, he says, since an eclipse cannot take place at the full moon, the state it was in at the time of Passover when Jesus was crucified. Africanus' reasoning as to Thallus' 'mistake' is snagged on his own presumption that the Thallus event is referring to the Gospel event.²⁵⁰

Van Voorst (*op.cit.*, p.20) is another who misrepresents the passage when he says that "Julius argues that Thallus was 'wrong' to argue that this was only a solar eclipse," when there is no evidence that Thallus 'argued' against anything in mentioning his eclipse. Van Voorst backs away from this two sentences later by admitting, "Thallus could have mentioned the eclipse with no reference to Jesus." However, he quickly reverses himself again and suggests that Africanus, "generally a careful user of his sources" (something debatable or at least unprovable), did indeed read Thallus as making "a hostile reference to Jesus' death. The context in Julius shows that he is refuting Thallus' argument that the darkness is not religiously significant." But such a context is not at all evident. Nothing in that brief sentence need suggest that Thallus is concerned with refuting a Christian claim. Since Africanus is himself disposed to equate the world darkness he has just been discussing with Thallus' reported eclipse, then he will naturally be led to say that Thallus calling it an eclipse was wrong.

Van Voorst further appeals to Maurice Goguel in the latter's *Life of Jesus* (p.91-2):

"If Thallus had been writing simply as a chronographer who mentions an eclipse which occurred in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius, Julius Africanus would not have said that he was mistaken, but he would have used his evidence to confirm the Christian tradition."

But Thallus' label of an "eclipse," in Africanus' thinking, *was* a mistake, and thus there is nothing unusual in him having said so. Moreover, Africanus, simply by bringing it up and labeling it a mistake, *has* used Thallus to confirm Christian tradition, since the explicit corollary is that Thallus' mislabeled eclipse was actually the darkness at the crucifixion and thus a confirmation of it.

Despite Van Voorst's admission that "Some fog of uncertainty still surrounds Thallus's statement," he can nevertheless go on to say that "a tradition about

Jesus' death is probably present," and "We can conclude that this element of Christian tradition was known outside of Christian circles and that Thallus felt it necessary to refute it." Now firmly entrenched in the position that Thallus did indeed mention the eclipse with reference to Jesus, Van Voorst further surmises that "Thallos may have been knowledgeable about other elements of the Christian tradition of Jesus' death." When one adopts an unfounded conclusion to begin with, it seems there is little limit to the unfounded conclusions that may proceed from the first one.

John P. Meier wisely forbears addressing Thallus and Phlegon at all.

Prior to referring to Thallus (see above quote), Africanus has mentioned not only the darkness over the world, but another prodigy of nature, an earthquake causing destruction in "many places in Judea and the rest of the world." The location in Judea may be drawn from Matthew (the only Gospel to give us an earthquake), but what of "the rest of the world"? As it happens, we can find a reference to such an earthquake recorded in certain chronicles, one of them being Phlegon (though Africanus has not included an earthquake in his account of Phlegon), and in association with an eclipse.

Eusebius and Jerome

Here we can further quote from Syncellus who, shortly after the above passage, leaves Africanus behind and quotes from Eusebius' lost *Chronicle*:

"Jesus Christ underwent his passion in the 18th year of Tiberius [32 CE]. Also at that time in another Greek compendium we find an event recorded in these words: 'the sun was eclipsed, Bithynia was struck by an earthquake, and in the city of Nicaea many buildings fell.' All these things happened to occur during the Lord's passion. In fact, Phlegon, too, a distinguished reckoner of Olympiads, wrote more on these events in his 13th book, saying this: 'Now, in the fourth year of the 202nd Olympiad [32 CE], a great eclipse of the sun occurred at the sixth hour [noon] that excelled every other before it, turning the day into such darkness of night that the stars could be seen in heaven, and the earth moved in Bithynia, toppling many buildings in the city of Nicaea.' (Nicaea is in Bithynia.)

Who is the author of the first-mentioned "another Greek compendium" that recorded the eclipse and earthquake? It could be Thallus, but there were many chroniclers in that age and so we cannot be sure. (Africanus did not attribute to Thallus a mention of the earthquake.) But the thing to note is that we have here a quotation from some chronicler about a set of prodigies of nature in 32 CE, an eclipse and an earthquake. The "eclipse" is simply stated as such, with no context of a dispute over a Christian tradition about a darkness. Eusebius follows this with the remark that "All these happened to occur during the Lord's Passion." Clearly, this does not mean that the unnamed chronicler made such a connection; rather, this is Eusebius himself noting that those chronicled events coincided with Jesus' crucifixion; and he, like Africanus before him, has drawn his own conclusion that they are to be equated.

Jerome, too, in his translation into Latin of Eusebius' *Chronicle*, done at the end of the 4th century, largely agrees with Syncellus' quote of the above passage. We can first note that he renders the unnamed 'Greek compendium'—which is singular in Syncellus' quote of Eusebius—in the plural: "at the same time [i.e., the 18th year of Tiberius' reign] we find these things written verbatim in other commentaries of the gentiles." This, differing from Syncellus' quote (we do not know which should be held more reliable), undermines the possibility that Eusebius was referring specifically to Thallus. After enumerating the same three elements: an eclipse of the sun, earthquake in Bithynia and collapse of buildings in Nicaea, Jerome's rendition makes an almost identical remark to that attributed to Eusebius in Syncellus: "all of which agree with what occurred in the Passion of the Savior." Thus between Syncellus and Jerome, we can tell that, in whatever the unnamed historical source or sources Eusebius was referring to, no linkage was made between those events of nature and the crucifixion of Jesus. They are recording simply an observation on the part of Eusebius that the two coincided, with Eusebius drawing his own conclusions.

Eusebius then went on (in the above passage from Syncellus) to speak of a witness to these prodigies by Phlegon. He, according to Eusebius, specified that in the 4th year of the 202nd Olympiad, an eclipse of the sun occurred at the hour of noon, and an earthquake took place in Bithynia with the toppling of buildings in Nicaea. Again we have a quote, this time identified as from Phlegon himself, referring to an eclipse with no context of a Christian tradition. Neither Syncellus nor Jerome records Eusebius as making any remark implying that Phlegon himself had made an association between these natural prodigies and Jesus' death with its attendant darkness, something we would certainly expect Eusebius to have done if any of these chroniclers had voiced such a connection.

When we take this with Africanus' earlier comments about Thallus and Phlegon, where he has given us no identifiable statement or implication that either one had made such a connection, we can be certain that none of these historians who mention the eclipse—Thallus, Phlegon, or any unnamed others who may be lurking behind Eusebius' reference to some other commentator(s)—ever gave an indication that in their own minds they were referring to, let alone explaining away, the Christian tradition of a darkness at Jesus' crucifixion. Thus, the apologetic claim that Thallus and Phlegon may well be early witnesses to Christian tradition—even if they did not agree with it—is, from the texts, completely unfounded.

Another Witness

We may also have a source for what Phlegon said on these matters which is independent of Eusebius as quoted by Syncellus and Jerome. John Philoponus, an Alexandrian Christian philosopher of the 6th century, in his *On the Creation of the World* (2.21), makes an indirect quote of Phlegon, although it too could be reliant on Eusebius. After mentioning the eclipse in identical terms to Eusebius' quote of Phlegon (though he does not include the earthquake), Philoponus says:

And it is clear that it was the eclipse of the sun that happened while Christ the master was on the cross that Phlegon mentioned, and not another, first from his saying that such an eclipse was not known in former times, and also because it is shown from the history itself concerning Tiberius Caesar.

This has the clear implication that Phlegon did not make an association of his eclipse with any Christian tradition. Such a connection is once again being made only by the Christian commentator.

Not only is it surprising that none of these ancient commentators seem to have made an attempt to put such a connection into Thallus' or Phlegon's mouth, it is indeed ironic that despite this failure at such an attempt within Christian sources, it is modern scholars and apologists who have tried to suggest that such an association was consciously made by Thallus and Phlegon, roping the two hapless chroniclers into giving witness to an existing Christian tradition about the darkness at Jesus' crucifixion and thus to Jesus himself. Even that would have significance only if one or both could be placed in the 1st century, since even if they *had* been speaking of and explaining away the darkness, any knowledge of the latter, if they both wrote in the 2nd century, could have come simply from post-Gospel tradition a hundred years after the supposed fact. This would preclude any reliable pipeline into an oral or other earlier recorded phase, let alone into an *actual* world darkness recorded by historians of the time itself. Thus we can understand the apologetic effort to read the evidence surrounding Thallus as placing him in the mid-1st century. This, however, has been seen as a biased and largely insupportable position.²⁵¹

Christian Fingerprints on Thallus and Phlegon

But there is another feature of the ancient Christian use of Thallus and Phlegon which bears looking at. If we consider the earlier quote from Africanus by Syncellus and compare it to the quote of Eusebius by Syncellus and Jerome, we can note a very significant discrepancy. According to Eusebius, in a *direct* quote of Phlegon, the latter said: "...a great eclipse of the sun occurred **at the sixth hour,**" which is noon. But according to Syncellus, Africanus said:

"Phlegon reports that in the time of Tiberius Caesar, **during the full moon,** a full eclipse of the sun happened, **from the sixth hour until the ninth.**"

Not only is it impossible for an eclipse to take place at the time of the full moon, it cannot last three hours. Africanus' phrase "from the sixth hour until the ninth" is clearly taken from the Gospels which specify such a duration for the darkness (Mk. 15:33 and par.). And Africanus' accompanying phrase about the full moon is an attempt to link the event to Passover—which is observed at that phase of the moon—the Passover of Jesus' crucifixion. This spells either Africanus' personal twist on what Phlegon said, or it means that before Africanus, less than a century after Phlegon, Christians had already tampered with his text, introducing Gospel elements into it. (For at least a century, this would not have been a universal interpolation, for we can see that Eusebius used

a copy of Phlegon which did not contain it.) In any case, neither phrase could have been written by Phlegon—even picking up on a Christian tradition—for no chronicler would have said that an eclipse could take place at the full moon or last three hours. Either the interpolator was incompetent, or extremely naive in thinking that the discrepancy would not be noticed or would be accepted as put forward by Phlegon.²⁵²

When we get to later references to Phlegon, Christian tampering becomes even more obvious and extreme. In Agapius' 10th century *History of the World* (the same as offered an altered version of the *Testimonium* in Josephus), the author states that Phlegon said that in the reign of Tiberius the sun was darkened and there was night for nine hours. And when we get to Michael the Syrian two centuries later, he maintains that Phlegon had written: "The sun grew dark, and the earth trembled, the dead resurrected and entered into Jerusalem and cursed the Jews." This is not simply taken from Matthew, but is a fanciful expansion on that evangelist's own invention; Matthew at least did not tell us that his risen corpses converted to Christ and laid anathemas on their fellow Jews.

No one, neither Christian nor non-Christian writer, was immune to the shameless doctoring of their texts by Christian interpolators. And such examples show that doctorings even in the most obscure writers could eventually spread and take over the surviving record. It is regrettable that no copies of Phlegon and Thallus survive, especially ones containing such blatant nonsense as this.

Origen's Witness

But now we must look at the curious record of what Origen has to say about Phlegon. Origen, in his usual manner, does not give us direct quotes, but refers to Phlegon as support for his current argument, almost as though he is recalling at that moment what he *thinks* Phlegon has said. He is clearly not looking at the passage itself and is not even sure where he read it.

In *Contra Celsum* II, 14, when discussing Celsus' dismissive attitude toward Jesus' prediction of the fall of Jerusalem, Origen makes an appeal to Phlegon:

Now Phlegon, in the thirteenth or fourteenth book, I think, of his *Chronicles*, not only ascribed to Christ a knowledge of future events, though falling into confusion about some things which refer to Peter, as if they referred to Jesus, but also testified that the result corresponded to his predictions.

And later in the book he twice alludes to the prodigies of nature:

And with regard to the eclipse in the time of Tiberius Caesar, in whose kingship Jesus appears to have been crucified, and the great earthquakes which then took place, Phlegon too, I think, has written in the thirteenth or fourteenth book of his *Chronicles*. [II, 33]

(Celsus) imagines also that both the earthquake and the darkness were an invention; but regarding these, we have in the preceding pages made our defense...adducing the testimony of Phlegon, who relates that these events took place at the time when our Savior suffered. [II, 59]

We can note in the latter two quotes that Origen supports the recorded witness of Eusebius and even Africanus that no link was made by Phlegon himself between his prodigies and Christian tradition. The appeal is simply to Phlegon's report of the prodigies themselves, and Origen, like the others, is equating them with the prodigies at the time of the crucifixion. Having this many examples before us of Christian commentators failing to impute to those historians a connection between their reported prodigies and the events at Jesus crucifixion, we can confidently state that no such connection was made by Thallus or Phlegon, and thus both can be rejected as in any way witnessing to Christian tradition. Had any words to that effect been found in their writings, it is impossible that all of those later Christians would have failed to make a clear reference to it. To them, we can add those Christian commentators who referred to Thallus on other matters but not to his mention of an eclipse: Theophilus, Minucius Felix, Tertullian, Lactantius. They failed even to make an association of the eclipse with their own Christian tradition about the darkness, so there could have been no prompting in that direction by the chroniclers themselves.

We might observe that in all three cases, Origen, Africanus and Eusebius are equating the earthquake which Phlegon recorded (and perhaps Thallus too, although no one specifically assigns it to him) with the account of the earthquake in Matthew. But not too much critical acumen is being exercised here by those Christian commentators, for the account attributed to Phlegon invariably locates that earthquake in Bithynia, with the toppling of buildings in one of its cities. Bithynia is much too far from Judea to have even been felt there. For Origen, Eusebius and others to take this as equivalent to the Matthean earthquake, imagining that such a movement of the earth could extend from one to the other, or that an earthquake with an epicenter on the shore of the Black Sea was how God chose to register his displeasure at what was happening in Judea, is more than a little bizarre. Nor, in fact, does any account attributed to Phlegon (or Thallus) give a location for his eclipse of the sun. Perhaps it was in Bithynia as well. If so, moving along an east-west line, it could not produce anything near total darkness 500 miles away in a southerly direction. If Phlegon or Thallus had given the location for this eclipse as Judea, there should be no reason why our Christian writers would not have noted that. So they have simply assumed that the eclipse, if unlocated by the chroniclers, had to extend over Jerusalem.

But it is Origen's first quote above which is most interesting. Africanus, who was a contemporary of Origen in the early 3rd century, has indicated that the text of Phlegon may already have been tampered with to introduce Gospel elements. Has Origen given us another indication of such a thing? In the same "thirteenth or fourteenth book" in which Origen "thinks" Phlegon mentioned the prodigies, he also 'remembers' that Phlegon talked of Jesus' successful prophetic abilities, ascribing to Christ "a knowledge of future events," and at the same time "falling into confusion about some things which refer to Peter, as if they referred to Jesus." Are we reasonably to assume that Phlegon would introduce such things into his chronicle, even if he had encountered them in a Gospel or Christian

tradition? Or is this more likely an indication of some Christian interpolator inserting somewhere in a copy of Phlegon's work which Origen had read some remark about Christ's ability to predict the future?

Some have noted that Phlegon was a 'paradoxographer,' one interested in accounts of even the strangest and most outlandish prodigies which he had no qualm about including in his books. But prophets and predictions were a dime a dozen and hardly fell into the category of prodigies, outlandish or otherwise. Besides, what do the successful prophecies of Jesus in the Gospels amount to? Not much more than his prediction of the Temple's destruction. It is difficult to think that Phlegon would have encountered and seized on this successful prediction and decided to include a reference to Jesus in his chronicle on that basis. In addition, no other recounting of the content of Phlegon by Christians such as Africanus or Eusebius mentions this feature of Phlegon's report, and it is impossible to think that they could have overlooked it or would have passed up mentioning it. Either Origen has suffered another memory dysfunction, or he is indeed drawing on yet another Christian interpolation into Phlegon, but one which did not spread widely, since no one else witnesses to it. As for the unspecified mix-up between Peter and Jesus which Origen alludes to, this would have to involve an even more esoteric point which Phlegon is even less likely to have encountered and incorporated into his chronicle. Consequently, this too suggests that Origen is referring to something he saw in Phlegon's text that an isolated Christian interpolator might have included.

If a pagan historian like Phlegon in the 140s has learned such subtle details about the story of Jesus, then he has trumped almost all other Christian writers outside the evangelists, since before that time the vast majority of such writers show no knowledge of any such figure, let alone of his prophecies or other details which could be confused with details about Peter.

Blind to the Darkness

This study of the references to Thallus and Phlegon has conclusively shown that there is virtually no possibility that these chroniclers made or implied any connection between their eclipses and earthquakes with similar manifestations in Christian tradition. Moreover, we can surmise that they took no notice, or knew of no tradition, of an *actual* darkness attending Jesus' death, even if they knew nothing of the crucifixion and simply misinterpreted the reported phenomenon as an eclipse. Such an interpretation could never have been made. The "darkness" according to the only account of it—i.e., in the Synoptic Gospels (not even the author of John took notice of it)—took place at the full moon, it covered the earth, and its description does not suggest a simple blotting out of the sun's light by the moon, but a blanket of darkness hovering over everything like a vast cloud. (This is the impression created by Joel 2:10 which was no doubt Mark's inspiration for this piece of fiction, as it was for Matthew's addition of an earthquake.) No phenomenon of that nature and under those conditions would ever have been interpreted as a simple eclipse of the sun.

It is also ironic that some Christian scholars can go to the trouble of extracting a witness to this prodigy at Jesus' crucifixion from those two obscure and non-extant chroniclers, when a host of other better known historians with surviving works make absolutely no mention of such a thing. Pliny the Elder, the avid collector of astronomical phenomena, is silent, not even imputing a tradition about it to Christians, despite including prodigies that were held by various people in the absence of any confirming record of them. Ptolemy, the great geographer-astronomer of the 2nd century is likewise silent on such an event or tradition. Marcus Manilius, an indefatigable writer and poet on the 'science' of astrology lived in the first half of the 1st century; he too is silent on any unusual darkness. Valerius Maximus, a compiler of "*Memorable Words and Deeds*" who was on the scene in Asia around the year 30, has nothing to say. Josephus, Tacitus, Suetonius, Plutarch, Philo of Alexandria, all are silent on this dramatic prodigy of recent history. The annals of more distant cultures, the Chinese, the Indians, the legends of the Aztecs and even the Mayans who preserved and built their epoch-long chronologies upon astronomical observations and traditions, reveal no record of this world-wide phenomenon. Reading the event into the lost works of two insignificant pagan chroniclers can hardly serve to fill such a void.

II: Mara bar Serapion

The least significant non-Christian witness to Jesus is also the most enigmatic of all. There is an extant letter in Syriac written by a man named Mara, son of Serapion, who had been imprisoned (apparently in Rome) along with some fellow citizens, taken from a city in the east conquered by the Romans. The date of this man and his letter, written to his son, is unknown, and could be any time between 70 CE and the 3rd century.

The letter is a good length, for Mara wishes to give his young son a "record touching on that which I have by careful observation discovered in the world." We might call it a mini-Ecclesiasticus, although the writer is not Jewish. Yet like Sirach, he seeks to impart to his son the wisdom he has learned, mostly in the face of adversity or as a witness to it.

At the heart of the letter lies this passage:

What are we to say, when the wise are dragged by force by the hands of tyrants, and their wisdom is deprived of its freedom by slander, and they are plundered for their superior intelligence, without the opportunity of making a defense? For what benefit did the Athenians obtain by putting Socrates to death, seeing that they received as retribution for it famine and pestilence? Or the people of Samos by the burning of Pythagoras, seeing that in one hour the whole of their country was covered with sand? Or the Jews by the murder of their wise king, seeing that from that very time their kingdom was driven away from them? For with justice did God grant a recompense to the wisdom of all three of them. For the Athenians died by famine; and the people of Samos were covered by the sea without remedy; and the Jews, brought to

desolation and expelled from their kingdom, are driven away into every land. Socrates did not die, because of Plato [recording him]; nor yet Pythagoras, because of the statue [of him] by Juno; nor yet the wise king, because of the new laws which he enacted.²⁵³

Mara, by his philosophy, is now judged to have been a Stoic. Most scholars today regard it as unlikely that he was a Christian. He does not speak of Jesus' redemptive role and uses language uncharacteristic of Christians. (Whether or not his *source* was Christian is a point to be looked at shortly.) The first thing noticeable is that he does not refer to this "wise king" by name; if he knew that name, there seems no compelling reason why he would not mention it. The explanation that he deliberately suppressed it has to be dependent on him being a Christian. Another explanation, by Van Voorst (*op.cit.*, p.55), that he did not specify the name since he did not want to risk offending any Roman reader (the prison's mail censor, perhaps?) by including a reminder that it was the Romans who had punished the Jews, seems remote and overly subtle. It is more likely that Mara simply did not know the name (whether of Jesus or someone else), or had forgotten it when he wrote.

Other details surrounding this "wise king" do not fit the Christian situation. It is very doubtful, certainly throughout the century after 70, that a non-Christian, especially a simple citizen of a city possibly as far out of the way as on the Euphrates, would have been aware of Jesus and his teachings, much less regard him as a "wise king." Even Roman historians, as we have seen, barely mention Christians, and certainly not with any approval. It is equally unlikely that any non-Christian would perceive Jesus as having enacted new laws for the Jews, laws which are implied as having been adopted by them, since these are spoken of as being part of a continuing heritage, the element of this king which lives on after his death.

Nor is there any hint of a distinction between the Jews who suffered banishment and loss of their country, and a separate sect of the Christians with whom this 'wise king' is associated. Mara associates him with the Jews, not Christians. Nor is this likely to be because the two groups were undifferentiated in his eyes, since his focus on the "laws" of this king should indicate a sufficient knowledge of the Christian movement to produce differentiation. Moreover, the "king" is identified with the "kingdom" which the Jews lost by killing him. If Mara had any conception of Jesus' death by crucifixion at the hands of the Romans, he could not have made the point that it was the Jews who killed one of their own, as in his other examples; and once again, sufficient knowledge of the Christians would have precluded such a misunderstanding. It is also unusual that Mara would refer to Jesus as a "king," since no one would have been likely to conceive the idea that Jesus had been some kind of head of state, or even a religious leader of the Jews (and it is always one of these who enact laws).²⁵⁴

The Jews had not possessed kings since the pre-exilic period, and it is sometimes suggested that Mara might have had in mind king Josiah (ruled 639-609 BCE), who had some fame as a religious reformer and as Judah's most

noteworthy monarch after David and Solomon. Since Josiah's father had been murdered, Mara might have been confused about the situation; he might even have been unfamiliar with, or failed to remember, Josiah's name. Moreover, the Babylonian conquest and Exile took place only two decades after Josiah's death, and could fit Mara's idea that "from that very time their kingdom was taken away." A few sentences later, in enumerating the consequences of his three examples of murder, he says that the Jews "are driven away into every land," which most commentators take as the scattering of Jews following either the First or Second Jewish War—especially the latter, since from that time Jews were forbidden even to set foot within the neighborhood of Jerusalem. But a dispersal had also taken place at the time of the Exile and during the centuries following it, and thus the Diaspora itself, even before 70 CE, could have prompted such a comment. Finally, we can note that the figures of Socrates and Pythagoras were ancient from Mara's standpoint, making a reference to a recent Jesus something of an anomaly when included with them.

Regardless of the relative merits of all these pros and cons about what Mara could have had in mind, one general observation is consistently overlooked. Mara is not concerned with giving his son a history lesson, but rather to make a point of principle. As a history lesson, even his first two examples are slipshod. When did the Athenians die by famine and pestilence following the execution of Socrates? When, after the death of Pythagoras, was the island of Samos covered in the space of an hour by sand, presumably by an inundation from the sea? (Pythagoras, in fact, died in South Italy, nowhere near Samos.) To think that we can use the probably equally woolly and slipshod treatment of "the Jews" to ascertain who, what or when Mara was speaking of, is a dubious proposition. He may in fact have had only the vaguest idea of what he was talking about in regard to the "wise king" of the Jews. Perhaps it was indeed something in Jewish history related to the famous Exile and subsequent Diaspora, so indistinct in Mara's mind that he couldn't supply a name; or perhaps it *was* something to do with the Jesus figure but very imperfectly understood—in fact, ludicrously so. In any case, it may have been included ²⁵⁵solely to provide a third example. Even today, we like to present things in threes.

Van Voorst offers the point (p.55) that "we know of no one else besides Jesus in ancient times who comes close to this description." But not even Jesus "comes close" to the description provided by Mara. Taken together with the uncertainty of when he was writing and the infeasibility that within the first half of that uncertain period a pagan could have spoken of Jesus in this manner, there is no compelling reason whatever to regard this letter as providing support for the knowledge of an historical Jesus.

As to date, some scholars seek to place the letter shortly after 73 CE, when the Romans conquered Commagene on the upper Euphrates. While this preference may be motivated by its close proximity to Jesus in time, it is rendered virtually impossible by the unlikelihood that a pagan, especially at that distance and so early, could have known and presented the figure of Jesus in the

manner that Mara has. Others have suggested the 160s, following the sacking and burning of the city of Seleucia on the lower Euphrates during the Parthian war. This would make more sense, especially since it would allow the Jewish example to refer to their loss of country and dramatic dispersal as a result of the second Jewish revolt.

As a final observation, we might note the dubiousness of a pagan, even in the late 2nd century, placing Jesus on the same level as the "household names" (as Van Voorst puts it) of Socrates and Pythagoras, who in the ancient world achieved near-deification as wise men. Would any non-Christian place Jesus in their company? Not if we can judge by an apologist of the time like Tertullian. Van Voorst makes the ill-advised remark (p.57) that "some Christian apologists were able to compare Jesus to Socrates and other philosophers," apparently in an attempt to imply that pagans were capable of doing so as well. Yet in their need to explain why—with the exception of Justin—none of the major apologists until after 180 (Athenagoras, Theophilus, Minucius Felix, even Tatian in his *Apology*) makes any reference to Jesus at all, most modern commentators have maintained that the very subject of him was avoided because pagans had such a low opinion of the "crucified sophist" (so Lucian) that those arguing for Christianity's worth as a philosophy felt constrained to keep him in the closet. Attempting to compare Jesus with Socrates and Pythagoras is what Christian apologists of the 2nd century *should* have been doing (perhaps Van Voorst is unaware of the fact that, Justin excepted, they did not). And it is what non-Christians were very *unlikely* to have been doing; certainly, we have no record of it.

F. F. Bruce, whom Van Voorst quotes (p.58, n.103), makes a similarly ill-advised comment:

(Mara) led the way in what later became a commonplace—the placing of Christ on a comparable footing with the great sages of antiquity.

If Bruce means by pagans, then Mara would have led the way far ahead of his time, for pagan writers 'followed'—if they did so at all—only a long time after, especially if we were to accept Bruce's placement of Mara shortly after 73 CE. Had they done such a thing in the 2nd century, the apologists would not have had to keep Jesus under wraps, nor would Tertullian and others of the 3rd century have had to defend and rail against the pagan disdain and persecution of Christians as anything *but* wise and moral. As prominent a pagan philosopher as the emperor Marcus Aurelius attacked Christians, calling them obstinate and lacking in judgment (*Meditations*, 11.3). Van Voorst notes this (p.58, n.104), and acknowledges that it is in "contrast" to "Mara's appreciative use of Christianity."

Van Voorst seems aware of the need to qualify the implication of Bruce's remark by confining such an alleged practice of 'comparison' to Christians:

This was indeed a commonplace among Christian apologists, especially Justin Martyr, who argued for a positive view of the best Greek philosophers on the basis that they shared the same Logos [that was] incarnate in Jesus (Second *Apology* 10). This argument was rare among non-Christians.

Indeed, in the 2nd century—unless we include and place Mara there—it was not simply rare, it was non-existent. But even where Christians of the (pre-180) 2nd century were concerned, the 'commonplace' is not just found *especially* in Justin Martyr, but *solely* in Justin Martyr. (Nor can the other apologists be said to "share the same Logos incarnate" in a Jesus they never mention.) In his Second Apology 10, Justin compares Christ with Socrates and, of course, finds him superior. Such a comparison can be found in no other 2nd century apologist, including, in addition to the ones listed above, the Apology of Aristides (whose *seeming* mention of an historical Jesus is questioned in Appendix 11) and in the Epistle to Diognetus, which is really an apology as well. We do not even find it in Irenaeus who was a clear believer in an historical Jesus. The next identifiable comparison between Socrates and Jesus comes in Tertullian's *A Treatise on the Soul* 1 (written c203), though even here it is not a direct comparison with the personal wisdom of Jesus, but with "Christian wisdom." (Tertullian is a 3rd century writer, even though a couple of works may predate 200 by a few years.)

We might note that Minucius Felix (claimed to be dependent upon Tertullian) discusses Socrates as the "prince of wisdom." The pagan Caecilius challenges the Christian Octavius to "let any one of you [i.e., Christians] who is sufficiently great imitate if he can Socrates, the prince of wisdom" (ch.13). Octavius makes no attempt to assert Van Voorst's "commonplace" that Jesus was the equal of Socrates, if not his better. In the face of that challenge Felix is silent, something doubly telling since it is the Christian himself who has placed it in the mouth of the pagan.

Van Voorst tries to extract as much as possible from Mara's letter to indicate some reliance on it being a witness to Jesus, no matter how meager, though he admits that "the results for study of the historical Jesus are slim" (p.57). In examining the possibility that Mara has derived his 'knowledge' of Jesus from Christian sources, he notes that Mara's linking of the death of the "wise king" with the destruction of the Jewish nation, as cause to effect, is thoroughly and solely a Christian idea. Such a source—however vaguely it may have reached Mara's ears—does make sense, if we assume that he is speaking of Jesus. But if so, this too points to a date after the mid-2nd century, for we have seen that the earliest witness to such a linkage among Christians—that the death of Jesus was responsible for the fall of Jerusalem—does not appear until the time of Melito of Sardis (c.170). Before that, Christians themselves, as witnessed in Hegesippus and the 'lost reference' interpolated into Josephus, held quite a different view: that the destruction of the Jewish state was a result of the murder of James, not of Jesus. This is an observation which Bruce and other early daters of Mara who regard his "wise king" as Jesus have failed to take into account. Thus, if Mara was speaking of Jesus, he is necessarily writing late, which would make all of his information about an historical founder easily judged as relying on Christian post-Gospel tradition.

Thus, Mara bar Serapion, too, must be set aside as any witness pointing to independent tradition or memory of an historical Jesus.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Two Interpolations in the New Testament Epistles

[page 18, 58]

I: 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16

Many scholars have dismissed the italicized verses in the following passage as an interpolation by some later editor or copyist. They do so on two grounds.

One is the very apparent allusion to the destruction of Jerusalem in verse 16, an event which happened several years after Paul's death. Here is the passage in its entirety, courtesy of the New English Bible:

¹⁴You [those in Thessalonica] have fared like the congregations in Judea, God's people in Christ Jesus. You have been treated by your countrymen as they are treated by the Jews, ¹⁵*who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and drove us out, the Jews who are heedless of God's will and enemies of their fellow-men,* ¹*"hindering us from speaking to the gentiles to lead them to salvation. All this time they have been making up the full measure of their guilt, and now retribution has overtaken them for good and all.*

This finality of God's wrath would seem to signify an event on the scale of the Jewish War of 66-70, when the Temple and much of the city of Jerusalem were destroyed—not, as is sometimes claimed, the expulsion of Jews from Rome (apparently for messianic agitation) by Claudius in the 40s. The apocalyptic-sounding statement in verse 16 is unlikely to be applied to a local event in Rome which the Thessalonian Christians may or may not have been aware of. Besides, Paul's reference in verse 14 (which is usually taken as the end of the genuine passage, although some include verses 13-14 in the interpolation as well) is to a persecution of Christians by Jews in Judea, and even the presumed killing of Jesus was the responsibility of Judean Jews; offering a local event in Rome as a punishment for either crime seems inappropriate. Nor are attempts to give the "retribution" an even less significant meaning very convincing. There are also those who question whether any such persecution of Christians would have taken place prior to 70 (see Douglas Hare, *The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, p.30f), indicating that verse 14 could be part of the interpolation, by someone who had little knowledge of the conditions in Judea at the time of Paul's letter.

Eddy and Boyd, in *The Jesus Legend*, attempt to make a case for the authenticity of this passage, admitting that this is the only reference in the entire genuine Pauline letters "that positively *requires* us to accept that Paul viewed Jesus as a *recent* historical person" (p.211). The fact that it is indeed the *only* one

is significant in itself, but it is true that a lot is riding on it for both sides of the debate, and thus it deserves careful consideration.

It is often pointed out that there are no variant texts of 1 Thessalonians without the disputed passage. Since this is so, it is claimed, the insertion would need to have been made early (soon after 70) when there would hardly have been enough time for an evolution from the mythical to the historical Jesus phase. But this is an unnecessary assumption. Recently (see *The New Testament and Its Modern Interpreters* [1989], p.207f) scholars have begun to abandon the old idea that the first corpus of Pauline letters was assembled no later than the year 90. They now see such a collection as occurring at the time of Marcion in the 140s. Even though Romans and 1 Corinthians seem to be known by the end of the 1st century to Fathers such as Ignatius, the first witness in the wider Christian record to 1 Thessalonians—beyond the writer who used it to compose 2 Thessalonians, probably in that city—would come some time after the first corpus was formed. (Actual manuscript witness does not appear until the 3rd century.)

Thus the interpolation in 2:15-16 could have been made considerably later than 70. Well into the 2nd century, Christian anti-Semitism remained high and the catastrophic events of the first Jewish War were very much alive in the memories of both Jews and gentiles in the eastern empire. The inserted passage was probably the product of someone in Thessalonica, before the letter entered the corpus. It is even conceivable that verse 16 refers to the outcome of the Second Jewish Revolt (132-5), when Bar Kochba was crushed, the Jews were expelled from Palestine, and a Roman city was built over the ruins of Jerusalem.

Eddy and Boyd admit that the language is "arguably un-Pauline." It speaks almost venomously of the Jews "who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets," as "filling up the measure of their sins," with God's wrath "overtaking them at last." Paul nowhere else expresses such consignment to perdition about his fellow Jews, whom he expects will in the end be converted to Christ. Rather, this is characteristic language of 2nd century Christianity. Birger Pearson notes that this is "gentile anti-Judaism" and "foreign to Paul's theology that 'all Israel will be saved'." Eddy and Boyd argue that Paul could be voicing existing Jesus tradition as reflected in Q: there we find condemnation of the Jews for killing the prophets and the threat of God's wrath on this generation. But if Paul is lacking anything, it is the entire ethos found in Q and the community it reflects, namely the preaching and prophetic Jesus of the kingdom movement. Moreover, one of the things that Q itself is completely lacking is any apparent knowledge of the death of its Jesus, let alone a focus on it. In any case, even if Paul were alleged to know of Q sentiments, this would not mean that he would simply parrot them if they were not agreeable to his own outlook, and the point is they are not.

In this connection, Eddy and Boyd are forced to contend with the clear inconsistency of these sentiments with those of Romans 11. That chapter opens with these words:

I ask then, has God rejected his people? I cannot believe it!...No! God has not rejected the people which he acknowledged of old as his own. [NEB]

And Paul draws on scripture to confirm his point. Eddy and Boyd ask, "Is it not possible that Paul's theology evolved between the (two epistles)?" But the gulf between the two passages is a wide one, with no evidence anywhere else in the Pauline letters that it either was or needed to be crossed.

Romans 11 stirs the pot even further. Eddy and Boyd point out that here the theme of killing the prophets is raised by Paul, just as it is in 1 Thessalonians 2:15. But that theme went back centuries, and the other half—surely the more important half—of the accusation is missing, not only in Q but in Romans 11. There Paul speaks of the guilt of the Jews for failing to heed the message about the Christ, drawing on Elijah's words in 1 Kings about the accusation that the Jews had habitually killed the prophets sent from God. If in 1 Thessalonians he placed the two elements in tandem, the killing of both Jesus and the prophets, why would he not do so in Romans 11? Yet there he includes no responsibility on the part of the Jews for the ultimate atrocity of the killing of the Son of God himself. This should be an inexplicable silence if the passage in 1 Thessalonians were genuine to Paul and the basis of its accusation historically true.

But perhaps the biggest hurdle apologists have to overcome is the statement in 1 Thessalonians that it was the Jews who were responsible for Christ's death, that they had actually "killed" him. Would such a distortion of the historical record have come from Paul himself who surely would have known better if he knew anything about the death of a recent Jesus? Eddy and Boyd point out that "all four canonical Gospels and Acts ascribe responsibility for Jesus's death to Jews and Romans." But 1 Thessalonians does not make it a joint responsibility; it states outright that the Jews had done the killing. For someone to distort history like this would require a good degree of anti-Jewishness, something which Paul does not display but 2nd century Christianity does. It would require a passage of time and a build-up of antagonism between the community of the faithful and the perceived unresponsiveness of the Jewish people as a whole. Verse 14 presents a localized view of Jews in Judea, but what follows broadens into animosity toward Jews as a people, showing discontinuity between the two parts of the passage. "Enemies of their fellow men" is hyperbole Paul would hardly indulge in, and "hindering us from speaking to the gentiles to lead them to salvation" would not have been any specialty of the Jews of Judea, where in any case Paul did not operate. And Paul says nothing about having been driven out of Judea by the Jewish authorities; he chose the wider gentile market on his own.

These are some of the scholars who regard the passage as an interpolation:

- Birger A. Pearson: "1 Thessalonians 2:13-16: A Deutero-Pauline Interpolation," *Harvard Theological Review* 64 (1971) p.79-94.
- Burton Mack: *Who Wrote the New Testament?* p. 113
- Wayne Meeks: *The First Urban Christians*, p.9, n.1 17
- Helmut Koester: *Introduction to the New Testament*, vol.11, p. 113
- PHEME PERKINS: *Harper's Bible Commentary*, p. 1230, 1231 -2
- S. G. F. Brandon: *The Fall of Jerusalem and the Christian Church*, p.92-93
- Paula Fredricksen: *From Jesus to Christ*, p. 122

II: 1 Timothy 6:13

1 Timothy 6:12-14 reads ("Paul" addressing "Timothy"):

¹²Run the great race of faith and take hold of eternal life. For to this you were called and you confessed your faith nobly before many witnesses. ¹³Now in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Jesus Christ, [who himself made the same noble confession and gave his testimony to it before Pontius Pilate,] ¹⁴I charge you to obey your orders irreproachably and without fault until our Lord Jesus Christ appears.

1 and 2 Timothy and Titus ("the Pastoral Epistles") were written in Paul's name so as to claim the authority of the famous apostle for the views the writer is advocating. Most critical scholars date them between 100 and 125. They can be a product neither of Paul nor of his time. As J. L. Houlden says (*The Pastoral Epistles*, p. 18): "Neither in vocabulary and literary techniques nor in atmosphere and teachings is it plausible to suppose that these writings come from the same pen as the main body of Paul's letters." The Pastorals reflect the beginnings of a church system which only came into existence around the beginning of the 2nd century: a bishop, supported by a group of elders and deacons. As well, all sense of immediate expectation of the Parousia has passed. The Church is becoming acclimatized to the world and a future.

Timothy's confession of faith before many witnesses (verse 12) is interpreted as referring to one of two possible occasions: either the baptismal ceremony upon his conversion to the faith, or his ordination as a minister. Commentators usually choose the former, since baptism is the more likely event at which one could be said to be "called to eternal life." The sacrament was publicly administered before the congregation, providing the "many witnesses" referred to. Timothy is confessing his faith before God and fellow Christians. The content of that statement of faith no doubt had to do with a belief in Christ.

The way the reference to Pilate is introduced into the text (the clause in square brackets in the quote above) indicates that it is intended as a parallel to Timothy's confession in the previous sentence. But there is much to be concerned about in this assumption. (See J. H. Houlden, *The Pastoral Epistles*, p.100-1; J. N. D. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles*, p.143.) Jesus' situation on trial before Pilate is scarcely the same as Timothy's at his baptism, or even at an ordination. Timothy's confession is before God and friendly witnesses; Jesus' is not, and it puts Pilate in parallel to God, which is at best inappropriate, at worst irreverent. Jesus' declaration before Pilate is presumably a statement about himself, which is an awkward equivalent to the believer's declaration of faith in Jesus. With these difficult features in such a comparison, one might wonder what would have led the original writer to think of making it.

Commentators discount the possibility that the occasion of Timothy's confession was before a magistrate, when he might have been on trial for his Christian beliefs. No such event, from which the writer could have drawn, is alluded to in any of the Pauline letters. Besides, such a trial would hardly be

called a summons to eternal life. However, we must consider the possibility that a later copyist may have misinterpreted things in this way. Perhaps by some time further into the 2nd century a tradition had grown up that Timothy had been prosecuted for his faith. This may have prompted such a copyist to insert the idea that, just as Timothy had declared before hostile magistrates his faith that Jesus was the Son of God and Messiah, Christ before a hostile Pilate had declared these things about himself. Such an editor may have felt that while "God" (in verse 13) had a qualifying phrase, "who gives life to all things," something was lacking after "and of Jesus Christ," and the comparison with Jesus' trial was what came to mind.

It has also been pointed out that in the account of the trial before Pilate in the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus barely says anything, maintaining a stoic silence. His simple agreement, "It is as you say" in answer to the question "Are you the king of the Jews?" is hardly a "noble confession" to inspire such a comment as we find in 1 Timothy 6:13. However, John, when he came to revise the Synoptic passion story, had Jesus engage in a dramatic debate with the Roman governor, which could well have been the inspiration for the comment. Since attestation for the Gospel of John is lacking during the period to which the Pastorals are usually assigned, this would suggest that the clause is an interpolation from a later point in the century, when the Fourth Gospel was more widely known. The Pastorals are not included in the earliest corpus of the Pauline letters, so the fact that there is no manuscript evidence of the letter without this reference to Pilate does not pose a problem.

Moreover, only a few verses later (6:16), when speaking of God, the epistle makes this sweeping statement: "No man has ever seen or ever can see him." If the man Jesus of Nazareth had recently been on earth, standing before Pilate, a man who had in fact seen and come from God, one would not expect the writer to have said such a thing (apologetic technical nuances notwithstanding).

The possibility of interpolation is supported by something suspicious which occurs a few verses earlier. In six places in the Pastoral letters the writer uses the phrase "wholesome teaching." In five of these, there is no indication of the source of such teaching. In fact, the first time the phrase appears, in 1 Timothy 1:10, the writer (speaking as Paul) says that such teaching "conforms with the gospel entrusted to me, the gospel which tells of the glory of God." This pointedly ignores any identification of Jesus as the source of the teaching.

But in 1 Timothy 6:3 an unexpected phrase intrudes:

If anyone...teaches differently and does not agree with wholesome words—those of our Lord Jesus Christ—and with pious teaching, I call him puffed up and ignorant.

The phrase "those of our Lord Jesus Christ" (*tois tou kuriou hemon Iesou Christou*) has the look of a scribal notation originally made in the margin, which was later inserted into the text; it conveys the impression of a clarification. Also, in usual practice in a phrase of this sort—the words/prophecies/commandments of someone' such as God or the prophets—the article before the second,

identifying element (the "tow" of the above quote) is left out. See, for example, Hebrews 5:12, Barnabas 21:1, and especially Acts 20:35 and 1 Clement 13:2 which both have virtually the same phrase as 1 Timothy: "the words of the Lord Jesus" (*ton logon tou kuriou Iesou*) but without the additional article "*ton*" following "*logon*." Thus, even though grammatical rules may theoretically have required it, practice indicates that the original text would not likely have contained "*tois*," whereas it would have been a natural, even necessary, inclusion in a marginal or interlinear gloss. Moreover, the whole thing seems carelessly done, because the insertion fails to cover the succeeding phrase, "and with pious teaching," which we would expect to find identified with Jesus as well.

Kelly (*op.cit.*, p. 133) finds something else unusual. "There is no definite article in the Greek before 'wholesome words,' and we should have expected one if the meaning were 'the sayings of Jesus'." He also makes the above observation about the inclusion of the word "*tois*."

Note that taken by itself, the passage in 6:3 is not required to be an interpolation in order to maintain that the Pastorals know of no historical Jesus. Even if *tois tou kuriou hemon Iesou Christou* is part of the original text, it need imply no more than that the "teaching" is considered to be revealed through the spiritual Christ, in much the same sense as Paul's "words of the Lord." (See also the discussion concerning the "teaching" of Christ in 1 Clement [chapter 30].)

Thus we have here a very likely interpolation made some time after the letter was written, and it occurs just a few verses before another phrase, the one about Pilate, which seems similarly out of place. It is admittedly in my own interest to regard the reference to Pontius Pilate in 1 Timothy 6:13 as an interpolation, but there are clearly good reasons for doing so.

On the other hand, with the Pastorals dated to the first part of the 2nd century, if 6:13 were authentic it could simply be a reflection of the newly-developed idea, witnessed in the letters of Ignatius, that Christ had been an historical man crucified by Pilate. (See also note 77.)

Appendix 2

A Conversation between Paul and some New Converts

[page 26]

Scholarship has long suggested that Paul's silence on all things to do with Jesus' human life and career results from his "lack of interest" in the man, and his view that such things are "irrelevant" to his theology about Jesus. If we were to assume a steadfast refusal by Paul to gather or preach information on any aspect of Jesus' earthly life and teachings, we could envision something like the following scene. The setting is some rich Greek's house in one of the provinces, with a mix of converts and interested friends and bystanders gathered about Paul on a warm summer evening. Their conversation might go something like this:

DEMETRIOS (the host and owner of the house): So, Paul, tell us more about Jesus the Savior. I have heard that he taught the people with great authority about the coming kingdom of God, and how we should all love one another.

PAUL: Yes, I have heard rumors to that effect, but I consider such things to be unimportant, and as it happens I am not familiar with any of his teachings.

DEMETRIOS: I see. But your mission is to gentiles like ourselves, is it not? Surely Jesus himself included gentiles in his own ministry and directed his apostles to go out and preach to them? I would certainly like to think that he did.

PAUL: I suppose that's possible. I don't have any first-hand information.

HERMES: You have performed signs and wonders for us, Paul. I understand Jesus himself performed great feats over nature and once fed thousands with a few loaves of bread. My friend Ampliatus heard about it when he was in the east.

PAUL (clearing his throat): Oh, I don't concern myself with such things, and you shouldn't either. They're quite insignificant, and you don't need to know about them to believe in the risen Son of God.

JUNIAS: When I heard you would be here, Paul, I told my sick mother that perhaps you would come around to see her and expel the demon that is making her ill. I, too, have heard from a relative in Galilee that Jesus expelled demons and healed many people—

HERODIAN (interrupting in some agitation): Yes, the demons have been especially active in my own household. My brother has contracted a fever, and just last week the roof of my workshop collapsed for no reason—

PAUL (with a placating gesture): There is no doubt that evil spirits beset us on all sides, my friends, and we must have faith that God will deliver us from them. As to reports of healings by Jesus, perhaps he did, but then, every wonder-worker in the country makes such claims, so perhaps we should not place too much importance on such things.

OLYMPAS: You have told us about the coming End, Paul, and I look forward to our promised deliverance from this sorry world, but I am greatly frightened by what may happen. Did Jesus reveal anything to his disciples about what things would be like when he comes back from heaven?

PAUL (somewhat miffed): Who knows? Anyway, one can't rely on what those so-called 'men of repute' in Jerusalem are spreading around. After all, they're only fishermen. Besides, I have word on that directly from Christ himself—

AGRIPPA (a Jew): Some of my Jewish friends have heard of your preaching, Paul, but when I invited them to join us at table, they said they could not break their purity regulations and eat with gentiles. Did Jesus follow such strict rules and refuse to eat with the unclean?

PAUL (exasperated): I have no idea.

CRISPUS (looking a little pained): I have a Jewish friend, too, who is a follower of Christ. But he says that even the gentile has to be circumcised—(pained expressions all around)—and follow every aspect of the Jewish Law if he wishes to become a member of your faith in Christ. Is that so? Did Jesus teach that all those Jewish practices must be followed by us gentiles?

PAUL: My friends, my friends, why all these foolish questions? What Jesus may have said or done in the course of his life is completely immaterial. I have information on those things directly from heaven. And I have already informed you of the only thing that really matters, Christ's own suffering and death, and his rising from the dead. It is these that have brought us salvation!

DEMETRIOS (hastily, sensing some perplexity and unease among his guests): Yes, my friends, the Lord's passion is surely what we should be focusing on, and what he went through in his terrible ordeal. Tell us about that, Paul. Was he tortured and scourged before they crucified him?

PAUL (shrugging): I assume so. The Romans do that to everyone they crucify.

GAIUS (spitting in disgust): Yes, and they break the condemned man's legs to make him die more quickly and painfully. I suppose they did that to Jesus?

PAUL: I don't know. I wasn't there.

ARCHIPPUS: Tell us what he said, Paul, when they put him up on the cross. Even now the authorities are persecuting new believers in Christ and I wonder if we'll suffer their hatred, too, just as Christ did. Did he speak? Did he stand fast? Did he condemn them for what they did?

PAUL (curtly): I didn't ask. But let me tell you about what the Lord revealed to me personally—

JULIA: Oh, how I envy you, Paul! You who have been to Jerusalem and could stand on the very spot where Jesus was crucified. That would give me the shivers. You must have felt his presence. Is that when he spoke to you?

PAUL: My dear lady, I've never been to Calvary. I couldn't find the time when I went to see James and Peter. It's only a little hill, after all.

PERSIS: But the tomb, Paul. Did you not see that? Are there still signs of the Lord's resurrection? Do Jesus' followers pray there every Easter?

PAUL (throwing up his hands): As to that, I couldn't say. But one tomb is much like another, don't you think? Why fill your heads with such paltry details? We should better focus on the eternal significance of these events—

DEMETRIOS (noting nervously that a couple of his guests had quietly slipped away): Well, I am sure we all agree that Paul has been very enlightening on the subject of Christ Jesus. Perhaps we should retire to the atrium for aperitifs and he can tell us more....

Appendix 3

Jesus and the Savior Gods: the Question of Parallels

[page 142]

In any investigation of alleged parallels between the story of Jesus and elements in pagan mythology, an important part of the problem lies in the nature of the evidence being appealed to on the pagan side. The primary sources from which such comparisons are made are a motley uncoordinated array of texts and

fragments of texts, artifacts, frescoes, uncertain records of traditions and rituals, excavated temples and places of worship that require interpretation and a careful gleaning of their significance. A good example of an alleged parallel one often encounters is the birth of Mithras being attended by shepherds. We have no literary account of this event from Mithraists such as we do in the Matthew and Luke nativity stories. The idea comes from several sculptural representations of Mithras' birth, in which he emerges from the head of a rock, the rock being the cosmos. At the base of the rock are attending figures who have suggested to some the idea of shepherds. (Manfred Clauss, *The Roman Cult of Mithras*, p.69, voices the opinion that "there are no grounds for calling these two figures 'shepherds,' in the wake of the Christian nativity story," probably because they could also be interpreted as the familiar figures of Cautes and Cautopates of the tauroctony representation.) The rock itself, and the known fact of the tradition that Mithras slew the bull in a cave, have suggested that the birth was seen as taking place in a cave, which not only supports the shepherds interpretation, it leads to the 'parallel' that Mithras was born in a cave as Jesus was born in an outdoor enclosure (manger).

An example of a better attested parallel is the tradition that Dionysos turned water into wine at a wedding—his own, with Ariadne. This is mentioned by Walter Otto in his *Dionysos: Myth and Cult*, (p.98) and is derived from Seneca's tragic play *Oedipus*. Thus there can be no doubt about this one being a legitimate parallel. Might the author of the Gospel of John have consciously copied this tradition in his similar miracle of the wedding at Cana? We don't know. The Dionysian myth is tied to the common claim that at festivals of Dionysos, wine would miraculously appear in empty vessels, or that water set out overnight would be changed to wine by morning.

Other types of parallel are more subtle, involving comparisons of themes and motifs in the literature. According to Gerald Massey (and others), one of the characterizations of the Egyptian Horus (son of Osiris and Isis) was as the "good shepherd." Massey refers to portraits of Horus "with his crook in hand, shepherd(ing) the flocks of Ra beyond the grave" (*Ancient Egypt: Light of the World*, p.487). Here he does not identify the location and nature of this 'portrait,' but he backs it with references to the literary "Ritual" (Egyptian Book of the Dead). Horus, says Massey, "came into the world as shepherd of his father's [Osiris'] sheep, to lead them through the darkness of Amenta [the Egyptian underworld] to the green pastures and still waters of the final paradise upon Mount Hetep in the heaven of eternity"—which would justify styling Horus as a savior figure who bears resemblance to Jesus and other divinities as one who descends to an underworld to rescue the souls of the righteous.

The "green pastures" and "still waters" in Massey's statement are phrases used to deliberately echo Psalm 23, since similar phrases are used in the Book of the Dead to refer to Horus' precincts; Amenta becomes the "valley of the shadow of death" of Psalm 23. The Psalms are relatively old, and their ideas could reflect themes that were originally derived from Egypt. Massey suggests:

"The portrait of Horus the good shepherd, who was likewise the arm of the lord [Osiris] in this picture of pastoral tenderness, was readapted by the Hebrew writer for the comforting of distressed Jerusalem" [*op cit*, p.532]. Even older is Isaiah 40:11, in which the prophet foretells the coming of God (not Jesus), who "will tend his flock like a shepherd and gather them together with his arm; he will carry the lambs in his bosom and lead the ewes to water." (Second) Isaiah was prophesying the end of the Exile (6th century BCE), and Massey suggests the very reasonable idea that such images could well have been derived from Egypt and the ancient Horus tradition. Whether Horus was a direct inspiration for the later imagery of the shepherd as applied to Christ cannot be said; but if Jesus as the Good Shepherd was an extension of God as shepherd, one might legitimately postulate that the original source and ancestor of both ideas was the Egyptian Horus.

Proponents of such parallels propose that Christianity formulated itself and its Jesus on the basis of this type of precedent in the mystery cult myths and other sources. But one problem here is that this overlooks the fact that in the earliest record of Christianity, as in Paul and other epistle writers, there is no sign of such 'biographical' parallels. In fact, there is no biography at all. The parallels in Paul relate entirely to the *principles* of salvation theory. Paul gives us no 'myth' of a Jesus on earth (an argument, as noted, against the G. A. Wells 'unknown past' interpretation of the Pauline Christ). His death and resurrection of Christ are soteriological constructs, not historical ones. The vast majority of parallels presented by researchers like Gerald Massey find no echo in the earliest writings of Christians. If we do not read the Gospels into the background of those epistles, Paul cannot be accused of 'borrowing' any of this from the mystery myths, beyond elements like death and rising, unity with the god, a homologic sharing in the god's experiences, baptismal rebirth, and sacred meals commemorating mythical activities of the god. Such ideas could certainly be interpreted as dependent, consciously or otherwise, on the mysteries, but nothing of it is biographical in the usual sense. And since nothing biographical about the Christian Christ can be found prior to the Gospels, the biographical elements become the responsibility, as far as we can see, of the evangelists. The Gospels are essentially the *adding* of an earthly myth to a spiritual one.

This contrast between Pauline Christianity and the mysteries is often pointed out. The fact that Paul has nothing like the extravagant 'irrationalities' of the savior god biographies is regarded as an asset. But then neither does he have any corresponding biographical features at all. While the cults had centuries to develop their myths, Christianity in the time of Paul was of recent vintage. Of course, the latter is no excuse for the Christian faith not to possess biographical traditions of their Savior if he had indeed lived in recent memory.' The very absence of such things suggests that the origin and character of the Christian Christ and his work of redemption reflected the salvation philosophy inherent in Platonism and its concept of a higher spiritual world. The fact that this is the exclusive venue of the Pauline Christ suggests that the initial Jesus operated

entirely within this philosophical and cosmological atmosphere at the turn of the era, when divinities inhabited and communicated from the heavens, descending and ascending its layers to grapple with the evil spirits (and occasionally be killed by them), and rescue souls from Hell, with no sign of earthly incarnation being a factor or a necessity until the Gospels came along.

This leaves us to assign the vast amount of "parallels" in the Jesus story to the Gospel writers. I have said earlier that Paul (and whoever preceded him in formulating the original expression of the Christ cult, perhaps surviving in the pre-Pauline hymns) may have absorbed mystery-salvation ideas that were 'in the air' of the period, in regard to how such a Savior would function and what sort of relationship the initiate and believer assumed toward him. In such a context we might more easily let Paul off the hook and postulate that such absorption was for the most part unconscious. But can we give the same benefit of the doubt to the Gospel evangelists? They were sitting at their writing desks, crafting literary documents. The pervasive midrashic content of their work, based on the Jewish scriptures, was hardly unconscious. If they did not have the Septuagint open on the desk in front of them, it was open in their minds through close familiarity. While multiple sources may have been in operation, it is impossible to rule out some conscious mimicking of the pagan myths in creating many of the features they gave to Jesus; at the very least, an unconscious tapping of mythemes and motifs that were prevalent in the religious expressions of the time is more than feasible. They did, after all, write in Greek, reflecting the culture around them. Even Galilee, if Mark wrote near to that vicinity, had a prominent Hellenistic population, and Syria next door even more so. In creating Jesus of Nazareth, or even fleshing out some historical figure they may have presumed lay behind him, it is anything but outlandish to envision the evangelists drawing on known myths and characteristics of the pagan saviors and other figures to give their Jesus the qualities and biography they wanted him to have, especially one their non-Jewish audiences would expect and could relate to.

As they say in the courtroom, the evangelists had motive and opportunity, and they show multiple indications of a consistent "M.O." To judge the extent of their plagiarism, it becomes a case of identifying with some degree of confidence the existence of such precedence of story elements in the mystery cults and other popular myths and literature. In some cases it is fairly easy, in others difficult or inconclusive. It may not be an exaggeration, for example, to say that the majority of alleged parallels between Horus and Jesus are either unfounded or overstated. But many concerning other mythical gods, and other categories of ancient literature such as hero figures like Alexander or Augustus, are suggestive and even compelling and have been well documented. Not all writers in this area in the History of Religions School were equally proficient or professional, and some would have benefited from bringing greater nuance to their comparisons. But simple blanket dismissal of the whole concept of parallels as "bogus" or without foundation is far too simplistic, and too often done without much argument or investigation to demonstrate why given parallels are alleged to be

unfounded. Apologists also have a habit of playing up legitimate distinctions within some of the parallels and arguing that this disqualifies them as parallels at all. The weakness or uncertainty of this or that particular claim does not alter the essential validity of the exercise or the general conclusions drawn from it.

This book is not the place for a comprehensive examination of such parallels. I would recommend to the reader my website article "A Cult of Parallels," part of my series on the Mysteries. There I discuss these basic principles and offer some representative examples, including a detailed discussion of one of the most famous and contentious of Massey's source claims: the wall engraving from the Temple of Luxor in Egypt portraying "The Annunciation, Conception, Birth and Adoration of the Child," with a reproduction of that mural.

The article is at: <http://jesuspuzzle.hnmanists.net/suppl3D.htm>.

Appendix 4

Dating Hebrews and the Authenticity of the Postscript

[page 214, 247, n.4]

Scholars generally acknowledge the strong arguments for dating the Epistle to the Hebrews prior to the Jewish War of 66-70, although they often hedge their bets by claiming such arguments are not decisive. Because there is no mention in the epistle of the destruction of the Temple in the War, one would tend to assume that this event had not yet taken place. On the other hand, the counter-argument has been made that other documents known to post-date 70 speak of the Temple sacrifices in theory even though they are no longer performed. In these, however, there are significant differences from the case of Hebrews. The two most common examples appealed to are Josephus and 1 Clement. In the latter's chapter 32, the writer says:

For it is from Jacob that all the priests and Levites who minister at God's altar have since descended.

This is a passing comment in a context which has nothing to do with the Temple cult. The writer, in speaking about Jacob and God's gifts in history, is stating a general principle in traditional Judaism. He would have had no special interest in pointing out that the Temple cult had ceased to be practiced. Similarly in chapter 40, 'Clement' is discussing cultic tradition; he is recounting "sacred lore" (v.1) and the Old Testament commands of God. Since he is using that lore as an illustration to his readers of how it is commendable to be obedient to the laws of God, he might well leave aside the observation that such obedience in regard to the Temple cult was no longer in effect.

Josephus, too, discusses Temple practice in an historical context, outlining the principles of the Old Testament cult (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk. III, ch. 6, 7, 9). In both these writers we may, in fact, be witnessing a use of the "historical

present." Moreover, neither of them had an interest in declaring the traditional cult, spoken of with a certain amount of pride, as dead and supplanted, whereas Hebrews very much did. Thus, this particular counter-argument has little force.

Indeed, it is almost beyond contention that Hebrews must be dated before the Jewish War and the destruction of the Temple. Hebrews' entire theology is based on the new heavenly sacrifice of Christ supplanting the ancient sacrificial cult, in effect since Sinai. Some post-70 writers may have written of a Temple cult as though it still existed because they regarded it as a matter of time before it would be restored, or else they regarded it as existing within the 'eternal' validity of the Law. But this is not the outlook of the writer of Hebrews. For him (as for Paul), the Law was supplanted; its sacrificial cult was anything but eternal. He would have had neither wish nor expectation that the Temple be rebuilt, nor would he have thought that the old cult had any further relevance.

Quite the opposite. He knew that Christ's heavenly sacrifice had sent the old cult and covenant into oblivion, and it would only be a matter of time before it passed from the world. He could not have said in 8:13, "he has made the first one [the Old Covenant] obsolete, and what is growing old and obsolete is near to disappearing," if the Temple sacrifices had in fact disappeared. This would have been seen as a mark of the fulfillment of what was looked for and it would not have gone unmentioned in the epistle. The destruction of the Temple would have been compelling proof of his position, God seen as shoveling the old covenant and its cultic basis onto the garbage heap of history through the agency of the invading Romans. The writer's focus may have been on the prototype sanctuary at Sinai (another counter-argument sometimes appealed to), but the continuance of that prototype in history and the present, which he occasionally refers to (as in 8:4), is also of import, and that is yet to pass away.

Another feature arguing for an early date is that the End-time, the anticipated arrival of the "completion of the ages" and Christ's arrival from heaven with it, is still a vital idea, with no sign that there has been a delay which has become troublesome (as in 2 Peter). Furthermore, we can see from other documents (such as the Gospel of Mark as well as Jewish writings like 4 Ezra, both datable to the late 1st century) that the destruction of the Temple led to a conviction among sectarian groups that the End could be expected shortly. But even though the author and his community regard themselves as living in the final days, no point is made about an imminent End as a consequence of the fall of Jerusalem, which would tend not to place the epistle in the immediate post-war period. Dating it beyond that period becomes too problematic, and thus we may fairly confidently locate this document somewhere in the decade or two prior to the War. There is even the possibility that it could have been earlier, given the open-ended genesis of Christianity without an historical Jesus, and the witness of Paul to an existing cultic Christ movement before his conversion and the presence of several well developed pre-Pauline christological hymns in his letters.

A possible argument ruling out a late provenance for Hebrews is an apparent quoting from its first chapter in 1 Clement. In 36:1-6 one finds several cases of

language in parallel with that in the first chapter of Hebrews. But this raises a separate question which is of some significance: is it in fact necessary to see 1 Clement as familiar with Hebrews itself? The author does not cite it by name, as he does the Pauline epistles elsewhere. Attridge has suggested (*op.cit.*, p.6-7) that Hebrews' author, in his scriptural citations in chapter 1, is drawing on an existing catena of biblical proof texts which may have served certain early Christian communities as demonstrating the exaltation of the Son in heaven. But if so, that collocation could be the source of 1 Clement's own listing. Indeed, Clement's different order may reflect the order of the catena, an order which the Hebrews author might have altered in the interests of fashioning a much larger argument. Even Clement's reference to the comparison of the Son with the angels (and it has distinctive anomalies in wording from that of Hebrews) could conceivably be part of such a catena document, since it serves to make the point about the Son's superior status in heaven, even if it is not a scriptural citation.

It is true that Clement in 36:1 refers to Christ as "high priest," perhaps the strongest indicator of a knowledge of the Hebrews christology and the document itself. And yet, 1 Clement in its great length nowhere applies this idea of Jesus as high priest in the distinctive manner of Hebrews, a high priest conducting a heavenly sanctuary sacrifice. If he knew and subscribed to this document as a whole, it is certainly a matter for curiosity that he would not draw on or reflect some of its powerful and distinctive christology. Nor do we see any sign in 1 Clement of the negative attitude toward the Temple cult which is so prominent in Hebrews.

There is thus ample reason to doubt that 1 Clement is anywhere dependent on or even has knowledge of the Epistle to the Hebrews, but is merely drawing on common traditions and sources. This would preserve Hebrews' independence and isolation from other cultic Christ expressions, something the document itself more than suggests. As for sharing the term "high priest" for Jesus, a designation found nowhere else in early Christian writings, 1 Clement might have derived it from other circles which have left no record; or it may have been a concept with some currency in Jewish intermediary Son philosophy, drawn on by the Hebrews community as well. Philo also refers to the Logos or first-born of God as a "high priest" (*On Dreams* 1.215, *On Flight and Finding* 108), though not with the same degree of personification as is found in Hebrews and 1 Clement.

Related issues are involved in the question of authenticity surrounding the final verses of this work.

Verses 20-21 constitute a benediction concluded by a doxology. Authenticity for these verses has been questioned, including in association with various amounts of the preceding text, sometimes encompassing the whole of chapter 13. It is uncertain that we need to go that far back, and few scholars do. But while verses 17-19 may seem a little out of character with the body of the work, that issue is not important here. The question of authenticity in the other direction, however, is definitely so. Verses 22-25 constitute what could be referred to as farewell greetings, something common at the end of the standard epistle:

²²I beseech you, brothers, bear with this word of exhortation, for I have only written you a few words. ²³Be informed that our brother Timothy has been released, and if he comes soon, I shall see you with him. ²⁴Greet all your
²⁵leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy send their greetings. Grace be with you all.

Harold Attridge (*op.cit.*, p.384) is of the opinion that "There is no reason to doubt that they too [verses 20 to 25] were composed by the author of the whole work." The fact of the matter is, where verses 22-25 are concerned, there are *many* reasons to doubt, quite apart from the fact that they have a completely different tone from what has come before. Attridge admits that they "serve an obvious epistolary function," but they also serve other functions which stand at odds with the rest of the work. We can put the objections in point form.

1. This postscript starts out by saying, "...I have written only a few words." Hebrews is only a little shorter than Romans, and one would hardly refer to Romans as "a few words." The attempted explanations for this anomaly which seek to retain the postscript as authentic are forced and unconvincing, and need not be detailed here. It is perhaps best seen as a bit of shortsightedness on the part of the later postscript interpolator.

2. The mention of "Timothy" can scarcely refer to anyone other than the Pauline Timothy. Unlike Christians of the later 2nd century, modern scholars reject a Pauline authorship for the Epistle to the Hebrews. Thus, the postscript can only have been added by someone intent on making it sound as though the author was Paul. Another scholarly suggestion is that the actual author of the epistle *did* know Paul and Timothy, or even that he had Paul write this postscript for him as an addendum. Yet can we believe that the writer of Hebrews knew Paul or Timothy? This would mean that the writer moved in Pauline circles. (This is clearly the intended implication of *everything* in the postscript.) But Pauline circles believed, more or less, as Paul did; and yet there is nothing identifiably Pauline in the principal strands of the Hebrews thought-world. It in no way reflects the soteriological system put forward by Paul, let alone his mode of expression in describing the saving activity of Christ and the believers' relationship to him; there is nothing like Paul's "baptism into his death" or his language of being "in Christ." Nor is there anything in Paul like Hebrews' christology. This double-sided incompatibility casts strong doubt that the postscript, with its blatant Pauline atmosphere, can be the product of the author or of anyone closely associated with the author.

3. The language and style of the postscript strongly suggests that whoever wrote it is *attempting* to associate the document with Paul or the Pauline circle—quite probably Paul himself, since "our brother Timothy" echoes the way Paul speaks of Timothy in his letters (2 Cor. 1:1, Phil. 1). Moreover, it speaks of the newly-released Timothy as being with the speaker when he next sees the readers. This is clearly meant to suggest an association with Paul, who historically (we presume) was known to have been accompanied by Timothy on his missionary journeys. Timothy may further have been chosen because of the pseudonymous

letters to him, indicating to the postscript writer that Timothy and Paul were closely associated, and this served his purpose of insinuating Pauline authorship of the document. If so, the fact that the Pastorals are 2nd century products might suggest that the postscript comes from that period as well.

4. We have a postscript but no superscript at the beginning. (Wilson [*op.cit.*, p. 17] makes a good case for rejecting the idea that there originally was one but it was deleted or lost.) If it was natural for the original author (or his secretary or some other associate) to add the typical epistolary ending, why not the typical epistolary opening? Especially if done at the time the letter was originally sent off when, to judge by the care taken in the writing of the document as a whole, sloppiness or oversight would hardly be likely. It is a later postscript writer who would be more likely to overlook putting on a salutation, or choose for some reason pertinent to his later time not to do so.

5. James Moffatt was quite honest in saying that attempts even in his day to identify the author of Hebrews as among the characters mentioned in the New Testament, were "in the main due to an irrepressible desire to construct NT romances" (*International Critical Commentary, Hebrews*, p.xx). He concluded:

The author of To the Hebrews cannot be identified with any figure known to us in the primitive Christian tradition. He left great prose to some little clan of early Christians, but who they were and who he was God alone only knows. To us he is a voice and no more. The theory which alone explains the conflicting traditions is that for a time the writing was circulated as an anonymous tract.

If this conclusion, based on the text itself, is indeed true, it is hardly likely that it could have done so with the postscript present. With an ending like that from the start, there would have been no doubt in anyone's mind that it was the product of Paul, and the idea of anonymity would never have arisen.

6. Some commentators find no difficulty in suggesting that the "letter" was being sent off to some distant community to which the writer does not belong. The postscript itself, as noted, paints the picture of an author who is a traveling apostle. It also says, "Greet all your leaders," as though their leaders are not the writer's leaders, let alone that he is one of them. (On this score, we may have to bring in 13:17 as part of the addition, as it implies the same.) Yet this cannot be aligned with the tone and content of the rest of the document, which very much conveys the impression that the author is *part* of the community he is addressing, and that he has much contact and discussion with them. For example, 10:24-25 says: "Let us spur one another on to love and good deeds, not give up meeting together, as is the habit of some..." Clearly he is not some outsider, let alone a roving apostle who only infrequently visits and who has ties with other communities—in contradiction to the clear implication of the postscript. (This is another example of the sloppiness of the postscript interpolator, who was not perceptive enough to realize that his added verses could not be aligned with the content of the document itself.) Logic dictates, therefore, that the author of the postscript cannot be the author or an associate of the author of the epistle proper.

7. If the writer were an outsider, a traveling apostle or someone associated with the Pauline circle (which is what the postscript conveys), the identification of "the religion we profess" as one in which the High Priest Jesus performs a sacrifice in the heavenly sanctuary (see, e.g., 4:14) would mean that such a faith was something held by, and preached to, other communities as well by the person speaking in the postscript. But no christological system as put forward in Hebrews is to be found anywhere else, in any other document let alone in anything produced by Paul or the Pauline circle. Consequently, the postscript, being blatantly Pauline, is thoroughly at odds with the content of the epistle.

8. If the postscript cannot be associated with the writer or his community, the next logical *Sitz im Leben* for its addition would be an attempt to bring this lonely-child piece of writing into the fold and make it part of the Pauline corpus. This would have been the period when many isolated writings among those now found after Acts in the New Testament were being collected, assigned authors, and where necessary turned into epistles, since this was the preferred way to convey theological doctrine and other admonitory issues to the faithful. Such a time is the mid 2nd century and beyond, when the Roman Church was assembling and modifying documents of all sorts and casting them into a picture of a unified movement (just as Acts, written at that time, was also designed to do).

9. The final device, verse 24's "The ones from Italy send you their greeting," is perhaps a little too obvious, meant to explain how the Roman Church got this letter—it was sent to them! But this is belied by the epistle's content, which is an admonition to the addressees by one of their own not to abandon their faith. This is incompatible with the postscript's picture of a letter sent from one community to another, and would moreover require us to assume that at some point the Christian community in Rome was in danger of collapse.

Why is the issue of the authenticity of the postscript important? Because if it is a later addition, there is no need to see this particular document as having a close relationship to other circles or writers in the rest of the Christian record. (Just as it need not be the case that Hebrews was known to 1 Clement.) Without the postscript, the document fits into the picture of a Christ-belief movement which had no central organization or common doctrine, let alone a single point of origin. Hebrews' prominent motifs of revelation and inspiration from scripture speak to a faith phenomenon which arose out of a background of widespread impulses that had no link at its beginning to any common founding figure. If an early dating is correct, scholars are right to wonder why, if Hebrews was written within the Apostolic Age itself, its presence or ideas have left no mark on the records of the primitive church. The answer is simple: there was no "primitive church" in the sense of a centrally based and generated organization, but only an array of sectarian expressions which drew on a common pool of concepts and influences. This isolation can be seen in Hebrews in the fact that there seems to be no interaction with any other group which has different views, no awareness of heresy, no contrary 'spirits' from God. In this, too, we see a lack of association with Pauline and other circles.

Appendix 5

The Gospel Chicken or the Epistolary Egg?

[page 255, 283]

In theology and doctrinal points, in language and expression, the epistles of John are more primitive than the Gospel of John; even those who argue that the Gospel came first acknowledge this impression. In 1 John, not a single Gospel detail is brought in, no teachings are attributed to a human Jesus. There is not even a specific reference to the cross and nothing at all about a resurrection.

Those who argue for the priority of the Gospel view the epistle as an attempt to reestablish more traditional principles in the face of a "runaway" interpretation of Jesus as portrayed in the Gospel. Those using the Gospel, so the theory goes, were moving in dangerous directions, specifically toward Gnosticism. Now, it is true that some form of the Gospel of John first surfaces as a favorite of second century Gnostics. Consequently, it was regarded with suspicion by orthodox circles until it was revamped around the middle of the century and brought into the ecclesiastical fold. But this is essentially a reversal of the claimed process. John was not an orthodox Gospel which came to be misused in a gnostic direction; it would have *begun* as an expression of a developing Gnosticism, while at the same time placing a foot in the proto-orthodox stream by adopting and adapting the Synoptic Gospels' human Jesus crucified by Pilate.

Nowhere in 1 John does the writer allude to that alleged situation, let alone spell it out. If he is countering a segment of his community which has "misused" the Gospel, how can he fail to refer to that Gospel? How can he avoid pointing to specific features of it in the course of defending a "proper" interpretation of Jesus? Why have fundamental doctrines of the Gospel simply dropped into a black hole?

One of these is the Paraclete. This concept is paramount in the Gospel of John: Jesus promises to send, once he is gone, "another to be your Advocate (*parakletos*), who will be with you forever, the Spirit of truth" (14:16). This Spirit promised by Jesus will guide believers until he returns. Now, 1 John is a polemical document. It attempts to counter various opponents it labels liars, deniers and Antichrists. In 4: If it speaks of true and false "spirits" claimed by different factions of the community; those which agree with the writer are "from God," those holding differing views are false, from Satan. But not only does the author show no knowledge of Jesus' promised Paraclete in all this, he lacks even the fundamental idea that any appeal can be made to traditions of belief or authority going back to Jesus. In other words, there is no "apostolic tradition." The world of the epistle writer functions according to current "spirits" claimed from God, nothing more; as such, it conforms to the wider Christian picture we see in Paul, of inspiration from the Spirit. That the author would either be

ignorant of or choose to ignore the entire Paraclete tradition as recorded in the Gospel, if this was already in existence, is impossible to accept. (Note that the reference to an "advocate" in 1 John 2:1 is not to such a spirit acting on believers, but to Jesus himself in heaven interceding with God.)

On the other hand, the development of the Paraclete tradition embodied in the Gospel could be readily understood as a subsequent solution to the problem of conflicting "spirits" in the community of 1 John. This sort of thing is a universal feature of sectarian activity: problems and disputes are solved by having an authoritative position on them read back into the past, usually at the beginning of the sect and embodied in a statement or action by the founder. Many ideas in the Gospel of John can be viewed as attempts to solve problems faced by the earlier community of the epistles.

While the Gospel of John has almost completely abandoned the expectation of an immediate end of the world, the epistle speaks of living in "the last hour" (2:18). The progression from imminent apocalypticism to an acceptance that the church faced a long-term future was a feature of Christian development as the 1st century passed into the 2nd. Yet we are to believe that the writer of 1 John "returns to a more primitive eschatological awareness" (J. H. Houlden, *The Johannine Epistles*, p. 13). Such patterns of regression rarely if ever take place, and no scholar has provided an explanation for why such an anomaly would have occurred here. Certainly, the epistle writer gives no indication that he is reverting to something previously abandoned.

Another improbable regression is from christocentricity to theocentricity. The Gospel, of course, centers on Christ. But in 1 John God occupies center stage, with Jesus a kind of supporting player. It is God "who dwells within us" (3:24); believers are "God's children" (*passim*). Knowledge and revelation, imparted through the rite of *chrisma* (evidently an initiation ceremony of anointing) is the gift of "the Holy One," meaning God. It is God who is to appear on the final day, not Jesus. "God is light" (1:5) says the writer, yet he has not a word for Jesus' own declaration: "I am the light of the world" (Jn. 8:12). The admonition to "love one another" is constantly reiterated in 1 John, yet such a command is said to come from God (2 John 4 and 6 make this unambiguous), ignoring the many times the Gospel puts such a recommendation into the mouth of Jesus. The concept of Jesus as a teacher is nowhere in evidence in the epistle, even amid references to the idea of Christian teaching. (This does not preclude the odd creative translation, such as the NEB's 2:8 and 4:21, where a reference to Christ is not supported in the Greek.) Rather, knowing and keeping the commandments of God is one of the central issues in 1 and 2 John, and only in the Gospel is this turned into the keeping of Jesus' commands. The epistle writer's advice to approach God with requests (5:14) becomes, in the Gospel, Jesus' appeal to ask of God anything "in my name" (16:23, etc.). This is the classic sectarian process of evolving a founder figure who attracts and embodies the sect's teachings and practices which were formerly seen as revealed through heavenly channels. The parallel with the Q community's evolution is striking.

The christology as a whole is notably more primitive in 1 John, but no one has explained how the epistle writer could simply rid his mind of more advanced modes of thinking and expression, nor why he would perceive it as in his interest to do so. If he feels progressive forces have gone too far with the Gospel, he is more likely to argue for the proper way of interpreting established expressions rather than abandon them altogether as though they never existed.

Does he now disagree that Jesus is the Logos or Word of God, or that this Word was made flesh? Apparently so, for in 'recasting' the mighty Prologue to the Gospel, he has discarded the Word and its incarnation, he has dropped the references to pre-existence and creation; and the figure of John the Baptist has mysteriously disappeared as well. Scholars who argue that the Gospel came first acknowledge that the opening of 1 John is "a poor imitation" of the Gospel's Prologue. But the more obvious explanation is that the opening passage of the epistle is the earlier formulation of certain ideas, a focusing on the "message" about eternal life which the community has received by revelation, and that the Gospel represents a later stage, producing a Jesus who was the proclaimer of that message and an incarnation of the Word itself—again, the sectarian impulse.

Finally, the concept that 1 John has been formulated to deal with a crisis over the Gospel would have to suggest that it was composed more or less at once, and by a single writer. Yet this ignores the state in which we find 1 John, and is inconsistent with the widespread observation that it seems to be a layered document put together over time by multiple authors.

It is not clear that the communities producing the epistles and the Gospel stand in sole, direct succession. There is reason to think that the relationship is more complicated than that. Judith Lieu has expressed the view (*The Theology of the Johannine Epistles*, p.16-21) that "the Epistles imply more than one community owing some loyalty to the Johannine tradition," and that "both the Gospel and First Epistle are the outcome of a lengthy process of development within Johannine thought." Noting also that a few recent scholars have started to turn away from the position that 1 John grew out of the Gospel, she suggests that Epistle and Gospel may be to some extent independent, each separately "crystallizing out of Johannine traditions in different circumstances." The epistles, in fact, suggest the picture of a multi-congregation community spanning more than one center. This would serve to explain why the latest stratum of 1 John indicates a concept of sacrificial propitiation on the part of the Son, something which is missing in the Gospel, where Jesus' death is not atoning. If the Gospel did not grow directly out of the congregation or communities which produced the epistle, part of the latter group may have developed such a concept independently, without feeding into the line which evolved into the Gospel.

The reluctance to see the Gospel of John as a later evolution in the Johannine communities is perhaps understandable. If the epistles are first and yet lack all sense of that Gospel's Jesus, all trace of the sophisticated discourses and high formulations of the "I am" sayings, it then becomes difficult not to conclude that the picture of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel has no historical roots, that it is the

unique construct of an isolated community, created for that community's needs. For mystic-minded Christians over two millennia, the sayings of Jesus in John have been a sustaining treasure, one not easily surrendered as having no likelihood of authenticity (even though critical scholarship has already reached that conclusion). By extension, this picture of a specific kerygma arising out of one group's experience would call into question the authenticity of all pictures of Jesus contained in the Gospels and elsewhere. The total lack of personality and detail about Jesus of Nazareth in the epistles of John, if primary, points to the void to be found in all pre-Gospel circles, a void filled only by the artificial constructions of the evangelists.

Appendix 6

The Gospels in the Valentinian "Gospel of Truth"

[page 294]

Jacqueline Williams, *Biblical Interpretation in the Gospel of Truth*, surveys this document for signs of usage of New Testament texts, both Gospels and epistles, and finds several dozen "Probable" and "Possible" candidates. She observes that it lacks much in the way of the elaborate Gnostic mythological system of heavenly aeons, and that figures viewed as emanations of God in later Valentinianism seem here to be merely attributes of the Father. For this reason, she and others date the work fairly early, in the 130s—a reasonable judgment. She notes that there is little interest in words or activities of Jesus except for a few highly stylized renderings—such as the crucifixion by Error, Or teaching to the "wise" and "children." (This, as noted, is a clue to understanding that they are not 'stylized' references to Jesus of Nazareth at all, but represent a more mythical stage of viewing the spiritual Christ, casting his activities allegorically.)

No words of Jesus are quoted verbatim, nor is anything directly attributed to him. Similarities are only general and can often be assigned to commonplace maxims (as in sec. 33). The Gospel of Truth never refers to a Gospel, nor to the idea of recorded material passed on in written form. There is no apostolic tradition, nor is Jesus placed in an historical setting. The possible dependence on Paul (no specific reference is made to him or to any other epistle writer) is heavily weighted toward the christological hymns, which are belief statements about the heavenly Christ; thus there may be dependence not on Paul himself but upon the traditions and ideas which he had drawn on. The Gospel of Truth seems heavily reliant on Johannine motifs but from a pre-Gospel phase of the latter, since it waters down so many aspects of John's Jesus figure and assigns many of them to God. Thus, any conclusion about this work's knowledge of the Gospels may well be the product of preconception.

One example of this preconception and the difficulties it involves will serve. Williams offers the passage 31:35 to 32:4:

...the shepherd who left behind the 99 sheep that had not gone astray, and came and searched for the one that had gone astray. He rejoiced when he found it...

This is reminiscent of the parable of the lost sheep in Matthew 18:12-13. But the Valentinian version does not present it as a parable told by anyone. It serves to elucidate the writer's preceding point about the Son coming to gather up those "who had gone astray" in the gnostic sense of those not yet awakened to their true nature and destiny; it also relates to a succeeding point about the symbolism of the number 99 graduating to the number 100. As well, any thought of a link to the Gospel of Matthew is immediately dispelled when the writer states that

The father is he who, even on the Sabbath, when the sheep that he had found had fallen into the ditch, labored over it and kept the sheep alive, once he had brought it up from the ditch.

Now it is God himself who is identified with the shepherd who finds the lost sheep, as well as with the motif of healing on the Sabbath. Williams (p. 126) seeks a way out of this by declaring that "Jesus must be identified with the Father as the one who brought the sheep up from the pit." But since this scene is used to allegorize the Son's search for the true Gnostic on behalf of the Father, and since its close identification of the Son with the Father is best seen as a feature of the heavenly Christ, derivation from the Gospel of Matthew must be regarded as unlikely, especially when neither this nor any other Gospel is ever identified. Other passages in the document attribute to the Father aspects which in the orthodox Gospels are associated with the Son, belying any view that such things go back to traditions associated with an historical Jesus. The Valentinians are tapping into a wide, more primitive fund of mythological thinking and allegorical devices which the Gospel writers have also drawn upon to help create their character and story of Jesus of Nazareth.

Nothing in the Gospel of Truth specifically declares an incarnation. The idea is notably missing in passages about the "going forth" of the Word (23,18f), and the manifestation of the Son as the "name of the Father," a name that "can be seen" (38,6-24). In 30-31, the Son is said to possess a "fleshly likeness." While this is reminiscent of the New Testament epistles' motif of "likeness" to flesh, its context in this passage is obscure; there are no recognizable earthly features. The awakened Gnostics are said to have been able to "taste and smell and touch the beloved Son." He has "breathed into them" the thought of the Father, imparting to them the light. Once again, this is the intermediary channel to and from God.

While scholars like to see in this a poetic account of the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, in the absence of any indicators of such a thing it is best interpreted as an example of allegorical presentation (common not only in Gnosticism) of the revelation and workings of the spiritual channel of the Son bestowing knowledge of the Father. In the prologue of 1 John, the same sort of allegory is in evidence; there, as seen earlier, it is a touching and hearing of the message of eternal life itself, not physical contact with the Son on earth.

Appendix 7

The Redeemer in the Gnostic "Paraphrase of Shem"

[page 294]

The gnostic document known as the Paraphrase of Shem contains a particularly fantastic and convoluted mythology of redemption involving a savior figure who cannot be presumed to derive from traditions surrounding the Gospel Jesus. It also contains elements which show affinity to the redemption mythology of Paul and other early Christ cultists. It provides an ideal example of the issues surrounding the question of pre-Christian Gnosticism and the independence of gnostic redeemer concepts from that of Christianity.

The cosmology of the Paraphrase of Shem consists of three spheres, each of which is personified as a primeval power. The highest is that of Light, equivalent to God; the lowest is Darkness, where evil and corruptibility reside. Between lies the sphere of Spirit, which partially shares the characteristics of the Light, but can become ensnared by Darkness which seeks to overpower it.

Within the highest realm, Light has emanated a Son, named Derdekeas; he is "the word and voice of the Light." He will be descending, not directly to save humanity which together with the material world has not yet been created, but to save Spirit from the wiles of Darkness, as well as to save Mind (*nous*) which is entrapped within Darkness's realm; the rescue of Mind will lead to the destruction of Darkness. This mystical personification of spiritual forces within the universe (and there are typically sub-personifications within such larger spheres and entities) is fully characteristic of mature Gnosticism.

The Son Derdekeas exhibits several features which have been encountered in cultic Christ circles, as well as in the Gospel of John. He is the image and embodiment of the Light, the radiance of God. He is the revealer of the Light, come down from Heaven (though on his own initiative). Derdekeas encounters hostile evil forces in the Darkness, which he overcomes. Part of that process involves putting on a 'form,' the "likeness of the Spirit," and in that disguise he goes unrecognized by those forces of Darkness ("There was not one of them who knew me" 36,14-15.) He "opens the gates" between the spheres which had been closed from the beginning, dividing the realms that will now be united. At the same time, he creates the celestial and material worlds in which fallen parts of the Spirit can be instilled for future salvation into the Light. On his ascension back to the higher realms, he will put on a garment of glory, to be exalted for what he has done. Like the commonality of mystery and hero mythemes between Hellenism and Christianity, the divine mythology of the heavenly world pervades both Christian and non-Christian expression.

It is inconceivable that this kind of redemption myth could owe its genesis to the primitive soteriology of the Gospels, although attempts have been made to

uncover Christian and Gospel influence, and even content, in this document. Interpretations of specific passages have even been grounded in Gospel scenes. For example, Derdekeas, in entering Darkness, can be said to undergo a kind of baptism—an undesirable one—because the sphere of Darkness includes the physical element of water. The latter term can be used in Gnosticism (as in the Apocalypse of Adam's 13 hymnic descriptions of the Illuminator's 'incarnation') to symbolize the lower realm as distinct from that of Spirit. In section 30, a "demon" appears, generated in the Darkness:

For he will seek the power of Faith and Light; he will not find it. For at that time the demon will also appear upon the river, to baptize with an imperfect baptism and to trouble the world with a bondage of water.

Michel Roberge, in his Introduction to the Paraphrase of Shem (*The Nag Hammadi Library*, p.341), sees this as a hostile reference to John the Baptist. A few paragraphs later (sec. 39), wicked Nature (part of the sphere of Darkness)

was about to fix (to the cross) Soldas who is the dark flame who attended on the [...] of error.

This is allegedly the crucifixion of the earthly Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnated form of the Savior, despite the fact that "Soldas" was previously the name given to the demon (30,33). The translator is Frederik Wisse, though in a reproduction of that translation (unattributed to him) on the Internet by "McLean Ministries" [<http://mcleanministries.com/NagHammadi/html/1732/001.html>] the phrase "fix (to the cross)" is replaced by the word "establish," thus eliminating any idea of crucifixion. (Whether this reflects an uncertainty about the original Coptic, or was done with Wisse's approval, is unknown to me.)

Birger A. Pearson (*Ancient Gnosticism: Traditions and Literature*, p.206) rejects the Christ-figure reading of this 'crucifixion' but allows for the possibility that John the Baptist "lurks" behind the other reference. Such New Testament leaning interpretations, of course, are born of the necessity to see the Gospel Jesus (and the Pauline one assumed to be based on the Gospel figure) as the universal source of the era's salvation mythology, to short-circuit any cognizance of Christian ideas as a mere product of their time and sharing both precedents and parallels with other salvation systems. And if Derdekeas and his universe are essentially pre-Christian, then they point to a source body of thought which early Christianity would also have drawn upon.

This document was later reworked within Christian Gnosticism in the form of a piece of writing (no longer extant) which the 3rd century Hippolytus refers to as the Paraphrase of Seth. Judging by his description of it, certain mystical scenes in the earlier version are directly interpreted as the incarnation of Christ; the "womb" of "Nature" becomes the womb of the Virgin Mary, and so on. But that reworking in itself testifies to the lack of such Gospel-based understanding in its previous life within the community which produced the original document. As Roberge admits (*op.cit.*, p.341), this would make the Paraphrase of Shem "a witness of a pre-Christian Gnosticism."

Appendix 8

The Absence of an Historical Jesus in the Didache

[page 390, 395]

At several points we encounter a silence in the Didache about an historical Jesus: as the source of the ethical teaching—some of it closely resembling that of the Gospels—contained in the "Two Ways" section (ch. 1 & 2); as the standard by which the itinerant prophets' authority and teachings are to be measured (ch. 11); as the one who will arrive at the Parousia (ch. 16); as the institutor of the community's thanksgiving meal (ch. 9 & 10). Neither is that meal a sacramental one, linking the bread and wine with Jesus' death. In fact, the Didache as a whole has nothing to say about a death and resurrection.

The only mention of Jesus comes in the eucharistic prayers of chapters 9 and 10, where he seems to be no more than a spiritual conduit to God, a revealer of "the life and knowledge thou hast made known to us through thy servant (or child) Jesus." In other words, a version of the intermediary Son. As such, he is part of the baptismal formula quoted in 7:1:

...immerse in running water "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

In the Didache we can detect no idea of apostolic tradition, no appeal to any authority or correctness of doctrine going back to Jesus or any originating phase of the movement. The document as a whole is thoroughly theocentric—centering on God, not Jesus. Everything is done in the name of "the Lord," meaning God.

Yet here is where some scholars claim to find a reference to Jesus. John Dominic Crossan, in his *Birth of Christianity* (p.377), suggests: "The *Didache* has a calculatedly ambiguous use of *Lord* to mean "the Lord God" and/or "the Lord Jesus." But this spiriting in of Jesus under a cloak of alleged ambiguity is unfounded, for a careful consideration of its usage in this document shows that "the Lord" *always* refers to God.

Consider 11:8. "Not everyone who speaks in the spirit is a [true] prophet but only if he has the character [*tropoi*] of the Lord" (Crossan's translation). Staniforth (*Early Christian Writings*, p.233) expands that last phrase to: "unless they also exhibit the manners and conduct of the Lord." Literally, the Greek is *ean echei tous tropous kuriou*, "unless they have the ways of the Lord."

Both of these scholars, and others, make the assumption that this refers to Jesus. But keep in mind that the document comes from the late 1st century, long after Jesus would have passed from the scene. Any lifestyle of Jesus would lie in the past, and would probably be cast in terms of a past phenomenon. The phrase above lacks this past dimension and has a very present flavor. Whatever this *tropos* is, it seems to be a standard which operates in the present.

By way of comparison, look back a few verses to another phrase, twice repeated. "Receive (the itinerant preacher) as (you would) the Lord" (11:2), and "Let every apostle who comes to you be received as the Lord" (11:4). For both the Didache's writer and its readers, there can be no question of receiving Jesus at this time, since he is long gone, and yet the sense of present receiving, of present—if theoretical—opportunity to receive "the Lord" *now*, is very much there. If the intention were to draw a parallel between how the community should receive the itinerant prophet and how it would have received Jesus in the days when Jesus himself was traveling from place to place, that past concept would likely be reflected in the choice of words.

Both of the above verses have illuminating antecedents. Before 11:4, verse 3 says: "As regards apostles and prophets, act thus according to the ordinance of the gospel" (trans. Kirsopp Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers* [Loeb], p.327). Lake observes that this ordinance is not known, nor its source, and "gospel"—virtually all would agree—does not refer to a written gospel but simply to the preached message. But if Jesus can be imagined in the very same verse as arriving at the door, if it were he who is held up in the key verse of 11:8 as the very model by which *behavior* is to be judged, surely he as the source of the teaching itself would spring to mind—and pen—here, as the *author* of the ordinance, rather than the impersonal "gospel."

Look at the initial half of 11:2: "But if the teaching [of the itinerant prophet] be for the increase of righteousness and knowledge of the Lord.. (receive him as [you would] the Lord)." 'Knowledge of the Lord,' especially in conjunction with the term 'righteousness': this echoes strongly of traditional Jewish concepts and terminology about learning of God and his ways. If Jesus of Nazareth were implied here, it seems clear that to distinguish it from the natural understanding of the phrase as referring to God the Father, a specific departure from Crossan's "calculated ambiguity" would need to be made. Instead, the pervasive use of "the Lord" with no designation anywhere that this term encompasses Jesus as well, seems to rule out any such meaning or ambiguity.

Back to 11:8 and its *tropoi* of the Lord. If the sentiment seems to lie very much in the present, what could the phrase mean? One might think that the writer is not likely to be speaking of *God's* manner and conduct—although an earlier verse to be examined shortly seems to say that very thing, and even 1 Peter 1:15 can speak of being "holy in all your behavior, even as the One who called you is holy." (The scriptural reference subsequently quoted makes it clear that this is a reference to God.)

In any case, there is a more natural way of interpreting 11:8. Bauer's lexicon offers as a translation of *exein tous tropous kuriou*, "have the ways that the Lord himself had, or *which the Lord requires of his own*" (my italics). Just as we would say that "following the ways of the Church" does not refer to the actual behavior of the Church hierarchy, but rather to the requirements laid down by the Church, so surely does the Didache's phrase mean that the itinerant prophets must exhibit—not Jesus' past behavior, but a conduct in their *own* present as

required *now* by "the Lord." The idea of Jesus' "ways" thus evaporates, and we are left with no reference at all in Didache 11 to either the example of Jesus' conduct or his teachings in relation to that of the itinerant prophets.

A careful examination of the roughly two dozen times the title "Lord" is used in the Didache leads to the conclusion that it is exclusively a reference to God, never to Jesus. Some uses are obviously so, and since the writer or redactor fails to make any distinction for a separate application to Jesus, we are led to assume uniformity. Here is a passage from the Two Ways section which opens the document (using Staniforth's Penguin translation with the odd alteration in the direction of the literal):

Never speak sharply (to) servants who hope in the same God as yours, lest they cease to fear the God who is over you both; for he comes not to call men according to their rank, but those who have already been prepared by the Spirit. And you, servants, obey your masters...as the representatives of God.... See that you do not neglect the commandments of the Lord, but keep them as you received them." (4:10-13)

This looks like an unbroken chain of reference to God the Father, complete with Old Testament allusions. God is spoken of as "coming" and acting through the Spirit; the latter, not Jesus, has prepared his way. This is a community which regards its message as God's product, imparted by revelation (just as Paul does). It is silent on any figure of Jesus in its past as arriving or imparting anything. Its commandments, its rules of behavior, have been received from God, not Jesus.

Give him (he who speaks the word of God) the honor you would give the Lord; for wherever the Lord's attributes (or nature, *kuriotes*) is spoken of, there the Lord is present. (4:1)

Kuriotes is a word referring to God (see Bauer's lexicon); the context is entirely of God. This meaning and these sentiments cast their long shadow over the verses in chapter 11, where "receive him as the Lord," and "unless they have the ways of the Lord," can be seen as a reference to God. Again, this is a community which regards itself as an emissary of God and a recipient of his direction. The personality and direction of Jesus is nowhere evident.

Not only are the Didache's apostles welcomed as one would welcome God, they come and speak in his name, not Jesus' name: "Everyone who comes in the name of the Lord is to be made welcome." Parts of the eucharistic prayer (10) tie the "name" unambiguously to the Father, again with Old Testament allusions:

Thanks be to thee, holy Father, for thy sacred Name which thou hast caused to dwell in our hearts.

Thou, O Almighty Lord, hast created all things for thine own Name's sake.

Thus, we can make a clear interpretation of this earlier part of the prayer (9:5):

No one is to eat and drink of (the) Eucharist but those who have been baptized in the name of the Lord; for concerning this also did the Lord say: "Give not that which is holy to the dogs."

Not only is baptism conferred in God's name, but a saying attributed to Jesus in the Gospels (Mt. 7:6) must be regarded as attributed to God in the Didache. Those who would object to this need merely look at 14:3, which offers another "saying" of "the Lord." This one is not a Gospel saying but a quote from the Old Testament book of Malachi. Scripture is the word of God, regarded as things he "says," and the saying in 9:5 is probably, prior to its induction into Matthew (7:6), from some writing now unknown.

Furthermore, we have in the Didache two references to the "gospel" of "the Lord." One is general: "Be guided by what you have (*echete*: have, not "read" as Staniforth translates it) in the gospel of our Lord" (15:4). Koester (*Ancient Christian Gospels*, p. 16-17) acknowledges that such references are unlikely to mean a written Gospel, but rather the oral message and instruction issued by the charismatic apostles of the community. This extends even to the other reference, a specific citing of the Lord's Prayer (8:2), which is a little different from Matthew's and is considered earlier. This citing is prefaced by: "Pray as the Lord commanded in his gospel."

In view of the continuous and unqualified use of the term "Lord" as applied to God in this document, and the lack of any general appeal to the teaching of Jesus, we have every reason to take this as a reference to God, to the message and instruction the itinerants carry which is regarded as coming from him, whether through inspiration or scripture. (See also the argument above that since "the gospel" in 11:3 is not attributed to Jesus, that it has no specific sense other than *God's* gospel.)

Thus the Didache provides evidence that the "Lord's Prayer" was indeed something which was seen to come from "the Lord," meaning God, and was only later, through the evolution of the Q document, placed in the mouth of Jesus by Matthew and Luke. A prayer like this, probably formulated at some time in the Didache community's past or contained in the traditions they inherited, would now be part of such a gospel, one "commanded" by God. (Note the reference in 4:13 to "the commandments of the Lord," which the context identifies as God.)

The presence of the "servant/child Jesus" in the eucharistic prayers, and of "the Son" in the baptismal formula, shows that certain elements of the spiritual Christ movement—but not the death and resurrection concept—have crept into the Didache community. There is also a passing use of the term "Christ" in 12:5: "If someone [i.e., the itinerant prophet] does not wish to cooperate, he (or she) is a Christ-peddler" (Crossan's translation, *op.cit.*, p.374).

But if this "Christ," along with the "servant/child Jesus" of the eucharistic prayers, is to be equated with an historical Jesus who began the movement of which the Didache community is a part, why does that same Jesus not appear in all the other places in the Didache examined above? Why is he not credited with the teachings, with the "gospel"? Why is he not the standard by which the itinerant prophets are measured? By the same token, if "the Lord" is claimed to be, at least some of the time, a reference to an historical Jesus, how can this human man be exalted to the extent of receiving God's own divine title, and yet

fail to be linked in the community's thinking with any of its activities or traditions?

Rather, we are looking at one particular offshoot of the widespread kingdom movement reflected in the Q document. The Didache community had, like the early stages of Q, no human founder or source for its teachings. But unlike Q, it has absorbed ideas of Messiah and Son (purely spiritual versions) in the course of its own evolution. This probably took place in Syria, where the idea of the intermediary Son seems to have been especially strong.

Appendix 9

The Date of Minucius Felix

[page 492]

The arguments for the dating of *Minucius Felix* center on three aspects. The first is a comparison with Tertullian's *Apology*, written about 198 CE. There is a literary relationship between the two documents, one clearly using the other. It is difficult to make a case for Felix using Tertullian, since the latter is longer and looks like an expansion of the former. There is no perceivable reason why Felix would have cut out those parts of Tertullian's work which include every single reference to the names of Jesus and Christ, to the crucifixion and resurrection, to the historical figure himself. If Felix wrote in the 3rd century, he alone of all the Christian writers during that period would show this void, whereas this is in keeping with almost all the apologists of the 2nd century. And it would mean that Felix has abandoned Tertullian's policy of urging the pagan to learn as much as possible about Christianity—including its founder.

H. J. Baylis (*Minucius Felix*, p.272-3) points out yet another inexplicable omission. While Felix deals with accusations against the Christians which relate to personal behavior and beliefs, Tertullian addresses a group of much more serious issues that had come to the fore by the late 2nd century and into the 3rd: "complaints collateral to high treason." They are traitors to throne and state, the cause of public calamities, useless as participators in trade and commerce. Since Felix's apology is devoted to countering pagan calumnies against the Christians, there could be no reason for him to ignore those 3rd century political attacks. Baylis calls them "the most plausible and practical, and therefore the most dangerous of all" and considers that Felix's silence on these matters is sufficient to disprove a late composition and dependence on Tertullian.

The second aspect is the two references to Marcus Cornelius Fronto, writer and tutor to emperors who died sometime around 170. Felix quotes Fronto as orating against the Christians, referring to him in chapter 9 as "our Cirtensian" (from Cirta in North Africa from where Felix himself hailed, although his work may have been written in Rome); and in chapter 31 he says that "it was thus your own Fronto acted in this respect," i.e., making charges about perversions at

Christian banquets. His manner of speaking suggests that Fronto is still alive; the latter remark in particular is addressed to the pagan, and its implied sense of immediacy would not ring true if written half a century after Fronto's death.

The third relates to philology (the study of literary texts). On the one hand, it is said that Tertullian had a habit of recasting his own works or those of his predecessors. For example, his *Apology* is a reworking, with some expansion, of his *Ad Nationes*. Philologists have noted that there are fewer resemblances to *Minucius Felix* in the earlier work than in the later one. This would suggest that Tertullian, when he came to write his *Apology*, went back to *Felix* for more of his text. It makes less sense that Felix would first borrow from *Ad Nationes* when composing his *Octavius*, and then when he came across the *Apology*, decided to expand his work with Tertullian's additional material. In fact, it would be more likely that he would have known of the *Apology* from the first. If it is suggested that he wrote a first version between Tertullian's two compositions, it becomes a little bizarre to imagine him plagiarizing in two phases at a time when Tertullian was active. Whereas, if Tertullian was building on Felix, he at least waited over a generation before he made use of another's work.

Minucius Felix is one who "models himself" on Cicero and Seneca, and this is claimed to indicate that he too was capable of making use of previous authors. However, there is a big difference between drawing on recognized, long-dead authorities to offer information and opinion on matters one is expounding, and reworking a recent writer's product in one's own name. As for thinking to detect similar 'borrowing' techniques in Felix's use of Cicero and Seneca, and his alleged use of Tertullian, the issue is anything but settled, as the following quotes indicate:

The final pages reopen again the debate on the priority of the author of the *Octavius* which Gilles Quispel has always held and which he still defends against all the philological arguments; because "Philology is a dead alley." [From a review of Gilles Quispel's *African Christianity before Minucius Felix and Tertullian* (1982)]

Minucius, Octavius and Caecilius must have been Roman citizens; they could not have embraced the Christian faith except before 202, the year when [emperor] Septimius Severus prohibited the conversion of Roman citizens to Christianity. [In a review of M. Brosius' *Quo tempore Minucii 'Octavius' conscriptus sit* (1994)]

The current state of the question is that a later date is favoured, with the philological argument being solidly in that direction. The priority of Minucius Felix rests upon the coherence and style of his narrative while Tertullian's priority depends upon the assumption that his is the more vigorous and therefore more creative work. Both sides employ *a priori* considerations regarding what characterizes creativity. Therefore, the results are predetermined. [Michael E. Hardwick: "Did Tertullian use Minucius Felix's *Octavius*?" (1997) at: <http://www.tertullian.org/minucius/mf.htm>]

When grounds such as coherence, vigor and creativity are used to "resolve" the priority between two works whose relationship has been debated for more than a century, we know that more solid evidence is lacking or being ignored. It is not surprising that Hardwick finds these grounds not only highly subjective, but susceptible to *a priori* determination. I suggest that where confusion reigns, a good way to break the logjam can be to introduce factors relating to Jesus mythicism and ask questions such as I have outlined above and in the main text.

Appendix 10

Minucius Felix's Rejection of the Crucified Man

[page 495]

One can detect a trio of features in *Minucius Felix* which render certain a rejection of the crucified man by its author. The first is in the accusation passage by Caecilius in chapter 9. This feature may be called "complementary linkage."

[A:] He who says that the objects of their worship are a man who suffered the death penalty for his crime, and the deadly wood of the cross, [B:] **assigns them altars appropriate for incorrigibly wicked men**, so that they actually **worship what they deserve**.

New Testament scholars are familiar with the principle that certain things can be identified as the product of the writer, and not something that could have been taken over from oral circulation. They are literary or editorial features. The ideas in bold in part [B] of the above are those of Felix. The basic accusation that Christians worship a crucified man and his cross represent pagan expression, practices they regard as deplorable. But the rest has too much literary style and sophistication. These elements can only be seen as the author's product: first, the metaphor of "altars" as applied to man and cross; second, the complementary linkage of the worshiped objects with the people doing the worshipping.

The former is "appropriate for" the latter, says Caecilius. In order for one thing to be appropriate for another, both must show some common central characteristic. The characteristic in regard to the worshipping Christians, the only one mentioned, is that they are "wicked." It follows that wickedness is being assigned also to the practice and objects of worship, the man and cross. The final phrase restates the linkage in a different way: "They worship what they deserve." Evil deserves evil. Wicked people deserve to worship wicked things.

The debate in *Minucius Felix* is a literary device, with Caecilius a fictional or representative character, whose words have been fashioned by Felix. Because the ideas in bold cannot be reflective of popular expression, circulating orally, they are Felix's product, and thus liable to represent his own thinking, not *contradict* his own thinking. The conclusion is that Felix regarded the idea of worshipping the crucified man as reprehensible, wicked, deserving of condemnation.

Now we proceed to Octavius' responses (in chapters 28 to 30). This second feature may be called "parallel treatment." This is not simply the placement of the crucified man response amid those to other repudiated abominations, which strongly conveys rejection by association. It is the manner in which Felix lays out those responses. For this, we need to detail the structure common to them all: (a) itemizes the content, (b) is the response offering denial, (c) is the "back-at-ya" accusation against the pagans. The crucified man item will be left until last.

1. WORSHIPING THE ASS'S HEAD:

- (a) Thence arises what you say that you hear, that an ass's head is esteemed among us a divine thing.
- (b) Who is such a fool as to worship this? Who is so much more foolish as to believe that it is an object of worship?
- (c) Unless that you even consecrate whole asses in your stables...and religiously devour those same asses with Isis. Also, you offer up and worship the heads of oxen...

2. THE PRIESTS' GENITALS:

- (a) He also who (b) fables [*fabulatur*] (a) against us about our adoration of the members of the priest, (c) tries to confer upon us what belongs really to himself.

3. SLAUGHTERING AN INFANT:

- (a) Next, I should like to challenge the man who says or believes that the rites of our initiation are concerned with the slaughter and blood of an infant.
- (b) Do you think it possible that so tender and so tiny a body could be the object of fatal wounds? That anyone would murder a babe, hardly brought into the world, and shed and sip that infant blood?
- (c) No one could believe this, except one who has the heart to do it. In fact, it is among you that I see newly-begotten sons at times exposed to wild beasts and birds...

4. THE INCESTUOUS BANQUETS:

- (a) And of the incestuous banqueting,
- (b) the plotting of demons has falsely devised an enormous fable against us, to stain the glory of our modesty, by the loathing excited by an outrageous infamy.
- (c) For these things have rather originated from your own nations. Among the Persians, a promiscuous association between sons and mothers is allowed...

5. THE CRUCIFIED MAN: Between Nos. 2 and 3 above, reflecting Caecilius' accusation pattern, Felix inserts his response to the crucified man charge:

- (a) Moreover [*jNam*], when you ascribe to us the worship of a malefactor [*hominem noxium*: criminal, man guilty of a crime] and his cross,
- (b) you are traveling a long way from the truth, in assuming that an evil-doer deserved, or a mortal could bring it about, to be believed in as God. That man is to be pitied indeed, whose entire hope rests on a mortal man, at whose death all assistance coming from him is at an end.
- (c) I grant you that the Egyptians choose a man for their worship...But this man... (This will be the number 3 feature below.)

Thus we can see that in all five cases, Felix's response pattern and the nature of its elements are the same. After (a) itemizing the accusation, he makes (b) a scoffing remark about how stupid, foolish or outrageous such an accusation is, how erroneous and incredible (a fable, a lie, a wandering far from the truth) it is to think that we are guilty of this, followed by (c) the comeback accusation that the pagans are guilty of doing those very things themselves. (In all this, the author shows surprisingly little imagination; he really is a one-trick pony.)

It should be evident that if Felix has imposed the same pattern of response on all five, he means the same thing in all five cases, he has the same attitude in all five cases. It is too bizarre to think that in one of these cases he has precisely the opposite attitude, that he does *not* intend to heap scorn on the accusation that Christians worship a crucified man. If one case stood out with an opposite meaning for him, he would hardly have thought, consciously or unconsciously, to treat it with precisely the same response pattern.

In all cases, he is reacting to the *offensiveness* of the activity involved in the charge. When he addresses the charge of worshiping a crucified man, he is reacting in exactly the same way, but now he adds a nuance to his standard (b) response. That nuance has been responsible for 1800 years of misunderstanding, and provided grist for the apologist's mill. Instead of just calling it an insult, or asking how foolish do you think we are to worship a criminal and his cross, he has decided that this would not be enough, probably because the point is not as blatantly self-evident as it is in the other cases. And so he fashions his (b) to include the **reasons** why it would be foolish for anyone to worship a crucified man and for the pagans to think that they would. And what are those reasons? *Because no criminal would deserve to be so worshiped, and no mortal could get himself to be so worshiped. These are the reasons why it would be foolish to do so*, reasons to drive home his dismissal of the validity of the accusation.

Modern scholarship has taken this powerful justification for regarding the worship of a man and his cross as foolish and unthinkable—just as the other accusations are foolish and unthinkable—and turned it 180 degrees to mean the opposite. Since Felix declares it is foolish because no criminal deserves to be worshiped, this means he meant that the man *was not a criminal*. Since Felix declares it is foolish because a mortal could never get himself to be thought of as a god, this means he meant that the man *was not a mortal*! He meant all this, even though he makes no statements to that effect—something he could easily have done—and has in fact created quite the opposite impression.

We can call attention once again to the general comment Felix has inserted in the midst of his responses:

These and similar indecencies we do not wish to hear; it is disgraceful having to defend ourselves from such charges. People who live a chaste and virtuous life are falsely charged by you with acts which we would not consider possible, except that we see you doing them yourselves, [my trans.]

This comment can hardly be meant to apply only to the preceding items (ass's head and priest's genitals), and not to those following, such as the slaughtering

of infants and incestuous banquets charges. But it would be perverse to place the crucified man before the latter and right after the comment about "indecencies," to leave it book-ended by all the rest, if he did not feel the same way about it, especially given the "*nam*" introducing it which virtually *declares* that it is being presented in the same category as the preceding ones. Indeed, he has presented the general comment itself in the same characteristic pattern: (a) the reference to charges he labels as indecencies, (b) calling them false and disgraceful, and (c) the counter-accusation. Thus the conclusion that every one of the five items surrounding it is meant to conform to this thought pattern is unavoidable.

The third feature constitutes the (c) element of the crucified man item. He has just said that the pagan accusation that Christians worship a crucified man is wrong ("far from the truth") because no criminal deserves, and no mortal is able, to be believed a god, and foolish is the person who places his hope in such a figure. Then:

I grant you that the Egyptians choose a man for their worship; they propitiate only him, they consult him on all matters, they slay sacrificial victims in his honor. Yet, though he is a god in the eyes of others, in his own he is certainly a man, whether he likes it or not, for he does not deceive his own consciousness, whatever he does to that of others...

He is saying, 'Now I know that the Egyptians have chosen to worship a man as a god, but the truth is he is *not* a god.' The clear implication here is that Felix disapproves of the Egyptian practice, simply because it is based on a falsehood and makes a man something he is not, and which he knows he is not. Instead, he makes a recommendation:

...The same applies to princes and kings, who are not hailed as great and outstanding men, as would be proper, but overwhelmed with flatteries falsely praising them as gods; whereas, honor would be the most fitting tribute to a man of distinction, and affection the greatest comfort to a benefactor.

Here Felix offers a further example of the practice of deifying men, in this case princes and kings. Again he is disapproving. He states outright that "praising them as god" is the wrong thing to do. They should simply be "hailed as great and outstanding *men*." Enlarging on this last recommendation, he says that the best thing to give to "a man of distinction" is "honor," and to a "benefactor" it would be "affection."

This passage cannot be used, as is sometimes attempted, to support a positive view of the crucified man, since it is in direct opposition to that alleged positive view. Felix is condemning the Egyptian practice of treating men as gods, which is hardly compatible with a view that it is acceptable for the Christians to treat *their* man as a god. In fact, the negative view expressed in the (c) element automatically renders the worship of the crucified man a negative thing in Felix's mind, just as it does in all the other cases. The "counter-accusation" always serves to criticize the pagans for doing the very thing they are criticizing in the accusation. If he is critical of the Egyptian practice of worshipping a man, he must

be critical of the idea of the Christians doing the same thing. Otherwise, the (c) passage is a non-sequitur and produces a confusing contradictory element.

Felix has also added a second (c) element, one regarding Caecilius' accusation that in addition to the crucified man the Christians worship crosses. Here he indulges in the same pattern. After the denial (b): "Crosses, moreover, we neither worship nor wish for," he presents the counter-accusation (c): "You who consecrate gods of wood, adore wooden crosses perhaps as parts of your gods." Then he goes on to broaden the topic and add several examples of the simple appearance of the cross symbol in Roman artifacts, in ships, and in the common prayer stance (arms outstretched to either side). Here he is no longer being critical, but his motive for adding them is to point out that the cross is also a natural and common phenomenon, perhaps to make the point that Christians would hardly worship something so common and universal.

The cumulative weight of all these results of literary-critical analysis make it absolutely certain that Minucius Felix does not in any way regard the worship of the crucified man as either acceptable or part of his faith, and has nowhere provided any qualification for Caecilius' accusation.

Appendix 11

The Curious Case of the Apology of Aristides

[page 496]

A minor apologetic work, usually dated to around 140 CE, is claimed as one for the historicist side of the ledger, an Apology which clearly puts forward an historical Jesus and Gospel traditions. It was thought to be lost until the late 19th century, when it was discovered in a Syriac version in a Mt. Sinai convent by J. Rendel Harris. At that point, it was realized that there was an extant form of it within a popular medieval romance called *The Life of Barlaam and Josephat*, originally written in Greek. There are some differences between the two, perhaps partly because that existing Greek version is an adaptation within a Christianized story of the Buddha set in India.

An Apology directed at a Roman emperor, the original document is regarded as having been in Greek. Eusebius records a tradition that it was delivered to Hadrian when he was in Athens in 125, but the recovered Syriac text addresses Antoninus Pius who ruled from 138 to 161. Harris dated it early in Pius' reign (138-161). The Syriac version is almost certainly derived from an original Greek. However, since the surviving Greek version exists within a story written late in the 8th century while the Syriac manuscript is dated to the 7th century, we do not have any early witness to the original content of the document. Nor can the recovered Syriac version be said to be derived from the surviving Greek version; thus, the literary history and relationship between the two will inevitably be obscure. But the principal differences between them relate to the passages which

refer to Jesus and the Gospel events, and when carefully considered, they arouse suspicion. There have been few studies of the *Apology of Aristides*, but none I am aware of have raised the present question.

This *Apology* possesses much of the same character as others just examined. It is primarily a defense of Christian faith and morality, prefaced by a detailed condemnation of pagan beliefs in their gods, along with milder criticism of the shortcomings of the Jews. In both of its versions, the remarks referring to Jesus and the Gospel events are found in a single passage, but of different length and content and in a different position in the work.

While we can presume that the Syriac version is derivative of a Greek one, the former conveys a greater sense of integrity, probably because of the latter's adaptation to a fictional story. So the Syriac will be examined first to see what impression it conveys. Its Jesus paragraph is quite short, occurring in chapter 2, where in the Greek there is no corresponding passage about Jesus. If we set that paragraph aside for the moment, the remainder of the apology does quite nicely without it, especially in regard to its other statements about the Christians.

Here is what this remainder has to say. In chapter 15, following on its treatment of the pagans and the Jews, the Syriac version passes to detailing a picture of the Christians. It begins:

But the Christians, O King, while they went about and made search, have found the truth; and as we learned from their writings, they have come nearer to truth and genuine knowledge than the rest of the nations. For they know and trust in God, the Creator of heaven and of earth, in whom and from whom are all things, to whom there is no other god as companion, from whom they received commandments which they engraved upon their minds and observe in hope and expectation of the world which is to come.

From there, *Aristides* goes on to detail the estimable morality of the Christians. The tone and content of this passage has much in common with other apologies outside of *Justin*; in other words, in laying out Christian "truth" in comparison with the religious beliefs of the pagans there is a predominant focus on God himself, creator and source of commandments, but no mention of Jesus, and here not even of a Son. The very declaration that "they went about and made search" implies a source of "the truth" quite different from hearing and inheriting the teaching of an historical founder (an identical statement was encountered in *Theophilus*); rather, what it suggests is an intellectual undertaking. It is strongly reminiscent of the 'philosophical investigation' motif expressed by *Justin* in the account of his conversion (*Trypho*, ch. 1-8) and by *Minucius Felix* (ch. 17-20), while others such as *Athenagoras* appeal to the prophets (not to Jesus) as supporting their philosophical reasonings. In fact, the language recalls that of those several apologists who, scholars have alleged, are deliberately indulging in euphemism and subterfuge to avoid making direct reference to Jesus when describing the background and sources of Christian doctrine and teaching—which in this document would make no sense, since in its chapter 2 passage it would seem to have referred to Jesus without qualm or misrepresentation.

The Syriac goes on in chapter 15 to detail the practices of the Christians, and here we find two mentions of a "Messiah":

And if they hear that one of their number is imprisoned or afflicted on account of the name of their Messiah, all of them provide for his needs...

They observe the precepts of their Messiah with much care, living justly and soberly as the Lord their God commanded them.

The phrase "on account of the name of their Messiah" is reminiscent of Q's reference to persecution "because of the name of the Son of Man" which there referred to a heavenly figure the kingdom sect was preaching. Similarly, there is here in Aristides no evident thought of this Messiah having been on earth. What his "precepts" are is unclear, especially since in the same breath the writer refers to living by the commandments of God. In the next chapter, we find this:

And they strive to be righteous as those who expect to behold their Messiah, and to receive from him with great glory the promises made concerning them.

Again, reminiscent of the expectation of the future arrival of Christ in the epistles, there is no suggestion that this Messiah had already been on earth. When the author speaks of the writings of the Christians, they are not described as "gospels," nor is their content said to include the life of the Messiah himself.

Throughout the work, there are a number of curious statements which, like statements by Minucius Felix and others, cast aspersions on pagan beliefs about their gods that are similar to beliefs we should expect to find among Christians:

It is impossible that a god should be bound or mutilated... [ch.9]

But that a god should...die by violence is impossible, [ch. 11]

And how, pray, is he a god who does not save himself? [ch. 12]

As in the others, this writer offers no qualification to these statements, no saving exception for any applications in a Christian context.

We must return to chapter 2 to address the Syriac text's sole reference to Gospel-like content:

The Christians, then, trace the beginning of their religion from Jesus the Messiah; and he is named the Son of God Most High. And it is said that God came down from heaven, and from a Hebrew virgin assumed and clothed himself with flesh; and the Son of God lived in a daughter of man. This is taught in the gospel, as it is called, which a short time ago was preached among them... And this Jesus had twelve disciples in order that the purpose of his incarnation might in time be accomplished. But he was himself pierced by the Jews, and he died and was buried; and they say that after three days he rose and ascended to heaven....

Any suggestion of this background is notably lacking in the rest of the Syriac version. It has the air of an insertion, creating an atmosphere of incompatibility with the rest of the text. We could make a comparison of sorts in regard to the Shorter and Longer Recensions of the Ignatian letters, where in the latter we find

solid blocks of Gospel summation and other Christian tradition inserted into the body of the originals, clearly meant to fill in the near-void on Gospel details which the originals show.

When we turn to the Greek version of the *Apology of Aristides*, we find that, with the exception of the occasional paragraph, it contains more or less the same material as the Syriac regarding the pagans and their gods. At the beginning of chapter 15, we find a Jesus passage corresponding (though not identical) to the one in chapter 2 of the Syriac, and this is prefaced by an enlargement on the passage about the Jews in which they are condemned for their rejection and killing of the Son of God who had come to earth, an idea not found in the Syriac.

When we look at the rest of the Greek version in regard to its presentation of Christian faith and morality, we find the same tone and content as the Syriac outside *its* Jesus passage: a focus on God and no appeal to Gospel data. Unlike the Syriac, there is in the later part of the Greek chapter 15 a Logos-like reference, but unassociated with the Jesus of the preceding 'Gospel' passage:

For they know God, the Creator and Fashioner of all things through the only-begotten Son and the Holy Spirit; and beside him they worship no other God.

Here the Son is presented in Logos fashion, an agent of creation, with no identification with a human man; it seems divorced from the earlier passage outlining the Gospel Jesus. As such it resembles the Logos descriptions of most of the other apologists. It is even implied that the Son is not worshiped. Similar to the Syriac, the text speaks of "the commands of the Lord Jesus Christ himself graven upon their hearts," and of those who "are ready to sacrifice their lives for the sake of Christ." But this could be referring to a heavenly Christ. In saying that Christians "look forward to the resurrection of the dead and life in the world to come" there is no reference to Christ's own resurrection; and indeed, outside of the respective Jesus passages, there is in either version no suggestion of any incarnation or atoning death on the part of a deity as the means of salvation.

An indicator in the Syriac's Jesus passage suggests that it has been derived from its Greek counterpart (see *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol.10, p.265, n.1). But the Syriac's lack of the passage critical of the Jews' rejection of Jesus suggests that the latter in the Greek is an addition to it after the Syriac translation split off on its own line. This would lend support to a proposal I will offer that the basic Jesus passage was an addition as well, made earlier in time. In both versions, that passage fails to be integrated into the larger text; it differs markedly in tone and content, whereas without it the *Apology* shares the same atmosphere and lack of an historical Jesus with almost all of the other 2nd century apologists we have been examining. Moreover, the two respective Jesus passages appear in very different places in the two texts, whereas, with the exception of a short paragraph about the origin of the Jews which the Syriac also places in chapter 2 with its Jesus passage, the rest of the two texts follow the same order in their material. This situation is a dead giveaway that the paragraph on the Gospel Jesus was an interpolated floater, added to the original texts at different points in time but not establishing a firm or common placement.

In the larger context of the documentary record as a whole, the Jesus passage in the Apology of Aristides fits the widespread practice of inserting Gospel and historical Jesus traditions into documents where they are missing, from Josephus to the letters of Ignatius to the imaginative creation of 3 Corinthians. We are fortunate that such imaginative practices did not extend to padding more of the earlier documents with Gospel material.

With the discrediting of the Apology of Aristides as a reliable 2nd century witness to an historical Jesus, we have before us virtually the entire apologetic literature up to 180 CE—Justin being the notable exception—which presents a defense of the Christian faith entirely lacking in an historical Jesus, as well as in an incarnation and atoning death for the entity known as the Son. Aristides is a particularly significant loss, given its relatively early date. If the original epistles of Ignatius are in fact forgeries, perhaps to be dated in the 120s or even 130s (I have argued against them being feasibly any later than that), we have been steadily losing any clear witness to the Gospels being known and regarded as history in the wider Christian world before almost the middle of the 2nd century.

The Apology of Aristides is regarded as the earliest surviving Christian apology. But Eusebius reports on one which has not survived and which may be even older. He speaks of an apology by Quadratus, a copy of which he possesses and which he says was addressed to Hadrian. He quotes (*History of the Church*, IV.3) the only extant fragment of this Quadratus, a reference to Jesus' miracles as having been witnessed by many and that some of those cured of illness or raised from the dead "survived right up to my own time." As it would have been impossible for someone in the second quarter of the century to reasonably make such a claim, the integrity of this lost work is greatly devalued. (In his translation of Eusebius, G. A. Williamson suggests that this, unlike the similar comment reported of Papias, could refer to Quadratus' youth, perhaps in the nineties of the 1st century. For those, however, who do not subscribe to the authenticity of Jesus' miraculous healings and raisings of the dead, the point is moot. We are left with an outrageous statement which can do nothing to create confidence in the Apology of Quadratus.)

However, there is other evidence to suggest that Quadratus is to be identified with a bishop of Athens of that name who flourished later than Hadrian (see Eusebius, *op.cit.*, IV.23), which would make his apology no earlier than the reign of Antoninus Pius and perhaps as late as Marcus Aurelius. In that case, Eusebius' report of its dedication would be erroneous and the remark in his fragment unsupportable. There has also been a scholarly line of thought which suggests that Quadratus' Apology is actually to be identified with the Epistle to Diognetus, with Eusebius' fragment mistakenly attributed, belonging in one of the latter's lacunae. The point to be noted here is that in regard to many of the 2nd century apologetic writings, there are notable uncertainties as to date and author, and even in regard to the dedications attached to them which have come down to us. We thus cannot rule out the possibility that the datings of the works of such apologists as Theophilus and Athenagoras, pushing 180, may be too late. (See

also note 189.) While the date of Theophilus' To Autolytus as 180 may be fixed by his reference [III, 27] to the death of an emperor who seems to be Marcus Aurelius, there is a contradiction between this and a reference in the next chapter to the death of joint-emperor Verus who died in 169. In either case, the long-range chronology Theophilus is presenting with its numbers of years covering the length of the Roman Empire does not add up, further clouding the issue.

H. G. Meecham (*The Epistle to Diognetus*, p. 149) notes that scholars of his day (mid-20th century) acknowledged "that earlier apologists, apart from Justin, are relatively silent about the life, miracles, passion, and resurrection of Christ," and that even the author of *Diognetus* "is throughout consistently silent about the earthly life of Christ." Scholarship has long sought for ways to get around this disturbing fact, but appeals to Aristides and Quadratus as exceptions whose weight helps balance the scales are, as it turns out, scarcely to be replied upon.

Appendix 12

The Question of Trypho and the Denial of an Historical Jesus

[page 491,509]

The point has been made that we could not expect critics of Christianity, once the Gospels were established, to have had any basis on which to challenge the existence of an historical Jesus. Any eyewitness to the times in which Jesus is alleged to have lived would have been long dead. Even at the earliest time that we can perceive the idea of an historical founder taking shape, or of any early Gospel starting to be taken as historical (as in the letters of Ignatius a decade or two into the 2nd century), this is still too late for such counter-evidence to be available. Within Christianity itself, we have seen certain indications of such a challenge, in 1 John 4 and in Ignatius himself. And the response to that internal *Christian* challenge shows how any non-Christian challenge would be met: with condemnation and ridicule—and rejection.

But do we have an indication of a possible Jewish challenge to the existence of Jesus in Justin's Dialogue with the Jew Trypho? Mythicists have tended to appeal to such a thing, though without the required nuancing of the issue, while dissenters have rejected such an interpretation. The final lines of chapter 8 read:

But Christ—if he has indeed been born, and exists anywhere—is unknown, and does not even know himself, and has no power until Elias come to anoint him, and make him manifest to all. **And you, having accepted a groundless report, invent a Christ for yourselves**, and for his sake are inconsiderately perishing.

It needs to be made very clear about what we are dealing with here. Trypho is Justin's own character. Even if based on someone real, or on a 'typical' (for

Justin) Jew, he is fictional. He serves a purpose in Justin's dialogue. He will say and reflect what Justin wants him to; like an obedient puppet, he will respond to Justin's remarks in order to facilitate the progress of Justin's argument. We cannot treat Trypho as though Justin has interviewed contemporary Jews and faithfully reproduced their arguments. Justin is formulating Trypho's dialogue based as much on how he, as a Christian, envisions Jews would argue against the idea that a Jesus crucified on earth by Pontius Pilate was the Messiah.

Eddy and Boyd have missed this important distinction. They say (*op.cit.*, p.170):

Trypho is not arguing that Christians invented *Jesus*. Indeed, his argument is actually predicated on Jesus's historical existence, for he is arguing that Christians invented a false conception of Christ and applied it to Jesus. The fact that Trypho assumes Jesus existed throughout the remainder of his debate with Justin Martyr further confirms our interpretation.

But it is not Trypho who assumes Jesus existed. It is Justin who is doing so, and he is casting his Trypho character in that light. It is *Justin's* argument, through reaction to Trypho, that is predicted on Jesus' historical existence. And behind these words of Trypho, which may represent some Jewish polemic, we cannot securely identify the idea that Eddy and Boyd are claiming.

Van Voorst (*op.cit.*, p.15, n.35) claims the same point, but accompanies it with a welcome admission: "This may be a faint statement of a non-existence hypothesis, but it is not developed or even mentioned again in the rest of the Dialogue, in which Trypho assumes the existence of Jesus." That is because such is not part of Justin's purpose, and he controls the dialogue.

Eddy and Boyd almost make a similar admission when they say:

[E]ven if Trypho is doubting Jesus' existence, his doubt is expressed over a hundred years after the time Christians claim Jesus lived and died—a fairly safe time for someone hostile to Christianity to concoct a 'Jesus never existed' theory, since by this time all eyewitnesses would have been dead.

This comment is exceedingly ironic, for when apologists attempt to deal with the mythicist contention that an historical Jesus came to life only in the Gospels, which began to circulate and be viewed as history in the early part of the 2nd century, they counter that people who knew this was not history would object and expose the falsity. But then they refuse to accept the mythicist counter argument, so similar to the one voiced by Eddy and Boyd, that "by this time all eyewitnesses would have been dead." (What might work for oneself should not be allowed to work for one's opponent!)

That said, however, the arguments put into Trypho's mouth must reflect a type (rather than in every detail) of opposition to Christian faith which was current, otherwise Justin would not devote the space he has to them. Behind Trypho's words may lie some kind of Jewish objection. Now, there are certainly places in the Dialogue where Trypho voices objections which clearly envision an historical man whom Christians have turned into a divine Messiah. For example:

Chapter 67: "You Christians should be ashamed of yourselves, therefore, to repeat the same kind of stories as these men, and you should, on the contrary acknowledge this Jesus to be a man of mere human origin."

Chapter 38: "For you utter many blasphemies, in that you seek to persuade us that this crucified man was with Moses and Aaron, and spoke to them in the pillar of the cloud; then that he became man, was crucified, and ascended up to heaven, and comes again to earth, and ought to be worshiped."

But the passage in chapter 8, quoted above, does not do the same, and we have to ask whether behind it might lie something which could encompass a denial of Jesus' historicity—even though Justin does not make use of it that way.

The key phrase is, "you invent a Christ for yourselves" (*Christon heautois tina anaplassete*). This is broad and unspecific language. It could reflect a current accusation by some Jews that "You have invented your Messiah," lock, stock and humanity. If the phrase is taken by Justin from Jewish parlance of the day and referred to Jesus (Eddy and Boyd suggest that Trypho "is simply denying that Jesus *is the Christ*") one wonders why he could not have said that, why it would not have been more specific such as: "You have taken a (crucified) man and turned him into the Messiah." Instead, "invented a Messiah" could well convey that the Jesus of Nazareth which constitutes that Messiah *has been invented*. On what has this invention been based? On "accepting a false (foolish, unfounded) report" (*mataian akoen paradexamenoi*). This may refer to whatever Gospels (those "memoirs of the apostles") Justin has knowledge of. But in being declared foolish and unfounded, this could encompass in Jewish opinion an accusation that they are completely false in regard to history and their Jesus character. Thus, in reproducing such a Jewish opinion in a more or less accurate phrasing—and we might consider that the phrasing is indeed fairly accurate as it is so ambiguous and unlike other more direct words on this subject which Justin has put into Trypho's mouth—Justin may be echoing a Jewish denial of the historical Jesus, even if he himself does not take it, or use it in the Dialogue, in that way. Such phrases may have originated in Jewish debate with Christians.

The issue, of course, cannot be resolved conclusively. It is indeed a cryptic statement on Trypho's part, as Eddy and Boyd concede.

Finally, we should note that the context surrounding this statement by Trypho is quite different from that of other statements about Jesus such as the two quoted above. It is not in the midst of the debate itself. It concludes Justin's prefatory account of his conversion experience with the old man by the sea (looked at in detail in chapter 31), an account which contains no reference to belief in an historical Jesus, and may well represent an earlier phase of Justin's faith. Nor is Trypho's remark followed by any rebuttal to it, so we are given no context in which we might evaluate what Trypho is supposed to mean by it.

Thus, there is more to this passage than meets the eye, and dismissal of its significance for the question of Jesus' existence should not be undertaken too cavalierly.

Appendix 13

John the Baptist in Josephus: An Interpolation?

[page 562]

The authenticity of the Baptist passage in Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* (XVIII, 5, 2 / 18:1160) is anything but secure. Frank Zindler (*op.cit.*, p.95-99) has made a fair case that the passage is an interpolation. Without it, the flanking paragraphs follow one upon the other even more cleanly and obviously than do the flanking paragraphs of the *Testimonium*. As well, a statement in a preceding paragraph contradicts one in the Baptist passage: Josephus has earlier said that the castle of Macherus was under the control of Aretas, Herod's enemy, whereas he is now saying that Herod sent John there to be imprisoned and executed, indicating that it was in Herod's possession. Like the *Testimonium* missing from *Jewish War*, so is any reference to the Baptist in that earlier work when Josephus discusses Herod and his downfall. Also like the *Testimonium*, a reference to the Baptist passage is not found in the Greek table of contents for Book 18, but was inserted in the contents for the Latin version of several centuries later. If it was interpolated, this had to take place prior to Origen's time, since he refers to Josephus' account of the Baptist in *Contra Celsum* I, 47.

As for why the Baptist passage, unlike the *Testimonium*, contains no clearly Christian elements, Zindler suggests that it could have been inserted by a Baptist follower, that "many non-gospel views of the Baptist existed during the first three centuries (indeed, a decidedly non-gospel type of John the Baptist holds a very prominent place in the Mandaean religion to this day) and an unknown number of them might have held the opinion now supposed to be that of Josephus" (p.97). This, of course, would rule out Eusebius as the interpolator.

It could be further observed that Josephus seems concerned to present a careful analysis of John's preaching and baptism—in far greater detail and sophistication than the *Testimonium* picture of Jesus. Since John died before Josephus was born, and since we are aware of no particular source from which Josephus could have drawn that picture (it does not come across like oral tradition, and neither Q nor the Gospels present John in that manner), one wonders at the knowledge and care that was brought to it. Is this another indicator that the passage is an interpolation by a member of a Baptist movement which continued after John's death? This could explain why no link is made between John and the Christian Jesus.

Steve Mason's observations (*op.cit.*, p.216-17) further cloud the picture. He notes that the Baptist was arrested by Herod basically on the grounds that he was a popular agitator. Josephus does not mention, as the Gospels do, Herod's unlawful marriage to his sister-in-law as a specific reason for John's antagonism, but simply says that Herod's alarm over John's popularity and outspokenness,

the possibility that he could engineer an uprising of the people, led the tetrarch to eliminate John in a pre-emptive strike. Mason asks, however, why that treatment of John did not mark him out for Josephus as a dangerous popular leader, the very category of men whom the historian had no sympathy for. And yet the passage speaks only favorably of John, a good and righteous leader. All of this, taken with Eusebius' remarks about the relative positioning of the John and Jesus passages in the text, makes it difficult to reject the possibility of inauthenticity for this passage.

However, Christians might actually be anxious to have the passage on John judged an ill-considered interpolation, since the account, located later than the paragraph on Jesus, is placed amid events of a period which lies too late (c34-37) to include the standard dating range for the ministry and death of Jesus. In the *Antiquities of the Jews*, the passage about John the Baptist comes after the death of Herod Antipas' brother Philip, which can be dated to 33/4, and before the expedition by Vitellius, the Roman legate of Syria, against the Arab king Aretas, dated 37. This latter event was in response to Aretas' attack on Galilee, which was brought about by Herod's repudiation of his first wife, Aretas' daughter, in order to marry Herodias, wife of one of his half brothers whom she agreed to divorce. According to the Gospels, the execution of John was the result of his condemnation of this marriage (and Salome's dance, which Josephus also fails to mention), and if it came after the death of Philip in 33/34, this would force Jesus' career to be placed after that year, allowing just enough time—or maybe not—for the crucifixion to have happened shortly before Pilate's recall to Rome in 36.

A date this late for the crucifixion also creates problems in early Christian chronology, including in matters relating to Paul. E. P. Sanders (*The Historical Figure of Jesus*, p.286f) tries to solve the problem by pointing out that in this section of the *Antiquities*, Josephus does not always present events in proper chronological order. Sanders notes that the appointment of Pilate, which can by other sources be reliably dated to 26 CE, precedes mention of the death of Germanicus in 19 CE (though both of these are mentioned in passing, tied to other subjects). From inconsistencies like this, Sanders suggests that the uproar involving the Baptist and Herod's marriage to Herodias may have taken place earlier than the period between the two datable events of Philip's death and Vitellius' expedition. But a gap of five years or more between that expedition and the prior death of John which supposedly set off the chain of events leading to it seems excessive.

Sanders further notes that the *Testimonium* comes between two events that can be dated in 19 CE, the death of Germanicus (a few chapters before the Jesus reference), and the Isis and Jewish scandals in Rome (immediately after the Jesus reference). He points out that strict chronology would require dating both Pilate and Jesus to an earlier period around the year 19—which the odd scholar (such as Robert Eisler) has done. Yet there is a difference between putting isolated anecdotes such as the scandals out of order, and disturbing the order of events which have important causal and sequential relationships.

Appendix 14

Robert Eisler and the Portrait of Jesus

[page 550, 568, 569]

The theories of Robert Eisler would not merit attention here were it not for the fact that they have given rise to a phenomenon which still enjoys a degree of popular circulation on today's Internet. To understand how Eisler's portrait of Jesus was arrived at, we need to take a close look at his most famous book, published in 1929 (English translation 1931), *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist: According to Flavius Josephus' Recently Rediscovered 'Capture of Jerusalem'*. In it, Eisler claims to provide a 'recovered' description of Jesus by Josephus from his (now lost) original version of *Jewish War*. It is derived, he says, "directly from the official report of Pilate, the governor, to the Emperor Tiberius," which he believes Josephus had access to. If that were the case, Eisler would have accomplished quite a feat, a revelation that would have swept the Christian world, both lay and scholarly, since it was first brought to light almost a century ago. But *is* it the case?

One can acknowledge that Robert Eisler was a profoundly erudite scholar, capable of astonishing detective work. He seems to have studied minutely the many versions of Josephus' works found in many languages, with their countless variants and interpolations. He was a master of reconstruction, drawing support from a careful analysis of the entire Josephus industry over a dozen centuries. His overall judgment, however, was governed by a principle which he felt was logically flawless: Josephus would not have ignored Jesus, therefore he must have said something about him. The alternative, that he did not, would open the door to the mythicists' claim that Jesus never lived, and this Eisler refused to countenance. He summed up this view on p.68:

So far [speaking of his various examples of Christian censorship], let us repeat, these conjectures would seem nothing but a very bold hypothesis: all the same, they would seem infinitely more plausible, even without further support, than the extremely questionable hypothesis of the non-historicity of Jesus, or the little more probable assumption of the essential insignificance of the Gospel events, or Josephus' unknown private reasons which are held responsible for his passing over in silence what he knew about Jesus, whilst he does not appear to impose upon himself the slightest reserve when he comes to speak of the other messiahs of that troublesome period.

Thus, if a given passage, or lack of one, was unacceptable as reflecting the genuine Josephus, Eisler believed it should be possible to reconstruct what he could have, or might have, or probably did say, drawing on the wealth of observations at his disposal to justify such reconstructions.

Eisler pulls no punches on the matter of Christian tampering with pagan writings, the excision of passages unfavorable to Jesus and Christianity, the erasing and blotting out which can be seen in some surviving manuscripts, and "the almost complete disappearance of anti-Christian books" (p. 12). He suggests that "the loss of all official documents referring to the trial and passion of Jesus" is explainable by the heavy Christian censorship of all things critical of Jesus and Christianity, exercised after Constantine. He sees this censorship lurking behind every perplexing silence in the non-Christian record; he calls this his "working hypothesis" (p.66), one extending to "the strange silence of Tacitus on the troubles happening in Judaea in the reign of Tiberius," referring to Tacitus' silence on Jesus in his *Histories*. However, he does not note that the same censorship apparently overlooked the extremely hostile and insulting passage in Tacitus' *Annals*, which may be another argument for the latter's inauthenticity.

Further to this, Eisler makes the observation that Josephus never mentions in any of his works the Great Fire of Rome in 64 CE, much less Nero's subsequent punishment of the Christians as those responsible for it. But rather than question the passage in Tacitus' *Annals* on that account, he suggests as "the simplest explanation" (p.65)—and in keeping with his overall working hypothesis—that Josephus did indeed devote space to the event, but included derogatory remarks against the Christians, and that Christian censors subsequently excised the whole episode. This seems very unlikely, even if it were feasible, for there would have been no reason to cut all mention of the fire itself. The Neronian persecution would have been extremely attractive to such writers as Tertullian and Origen (who would have preceded any Christian censorship) and other apologists decrying pagan persecution, all of whom would hardly have ignored such a report by Josephus, even if it contained comments hostile to the faith. In any case, censorship should have taken the form of amending the text, not excising it altogether. Defective reasoning like this on Eisler's part stands side-by-side with other more competent handling of texts and their tortuous paths of evolution.

The Evolution of *Jewish War*

Much of Eisler's reasoning in his tracing of manuscript evolution and derivation bears his own imprint. Scholars are agreed that the work we now know as *Jewish War* was in its initial version an Aramaic composition intended for a Jewish readership and other Aramaic speaking communities in the east, designed to discourage any further aggression against Rome. It was probably started before the War ended, but its precise date of publication is uncertain. Josephus then turned his efforts to a Greek version, whose date of publication, according to Thackeray in his Introduction to the Loeb edition of *Jewish War*, "is commonly regarded as falling within the latter half of the reign of Vespasian, i.e., between A.D. 75 and 79" (p. xii). It was produced with the aid of Greek secretaries and was an extensive rewriting of the original Aramaic version. Between these two, however, Eisler inserts an initial Greek edition which was essentially a translation of the Aramaic by those Greek secretaries, perhaps with some revisions under Josephus' direction. It was hurriedly completed, he says, in

time for Titus' triumph held at Rome in June of 71. Subsequent to this, Josephus worked on further editions and rewrites for at least another decade, now aimed at an entirely Greco-Roman audience. Scholars have not generally chosen to follow Eisler in this multi-phase scenario.

The original Aramaic has not survived. Textual analysis of the Slavonic Josephus in the years prior to Eisler argued that it was dependent on the lost Aramaic of *Jewish War*. Eisler rejected this, and instead refined the idea by maintaining that it was derived from his postulated original Greek version of *Jewish War* which had been little more than a translation of the Aramaic. He offered internal evidence (see, for example, p. 130-1) that the Slavonic Josephus was based on a Greek text which contained indications of the original Aramaic version, and thus he felt that the Slavonic texts were a pipeline back to Josephus' earliest writings. In his view, the title of the work also evolved. It would seem that the Aramaic version, and the first Greek edition derived from it, bore the title, "*The Conquest (or Capture) of Jerusalem.*" (According to Thackeray, many of the extant manuscripts bear that title.) Sometime in the course of producing later editions it was changed to *Jewish War*, and references to the work's title by Josephus himself conform to the latter. Eisler points out (as does Feldman) that early Christian writers such as Origen often referred in their own texts to the work using the phrase "*peri haloseos*"—"about the capture [of Jerusalem]" (see *Messiah Jesus*, p. 119-120). Indeed, this is the only title which appears in the Slavonic manuscripts.

The "*Halosis*," then, is the title Eisler has deduced not only for the original Aramaic work but the earliest Greek version which he believes was based on it. He also uses it to refer to the Slavonic Josephus, which quotes as a title the same phrase based on the Greek word "*(peri) haloseos*," rendered in anglicized form as "*Halosis*."

Separating the Good from the Bad...

Through the middle part of the book, Eisler examines Jesus' ministry and message, presenting many conclusions and reconstructions as to the details of both. Much of these are based on a confidence in New Testament accuracy about Jesus' words and deeds which we now know is misplaced, and on a similar confidence in recovered fragments of other sources. A reliance on Josephus' relative chronologies leads him to set Jesus' crucifixion in the year 19. And for his picture of that event in Jerusalem, Eisler draws on the Slavonic *Halosis*, which is to say—in his view—the original Josephan account of Jesus, now lost from his extant works.

The principle of critical methodology Eisler employs is stated on page 382:

everything of anti-Christian character, every contemptuous or disparaging allusion to Jesus and his followers, may be regarded offhand as the authentic work of Josephus; every statement exonerating Jesus and favorable to him and his disciples is to be set aside as an interpolation or correction introduced by a Christian reader or copyist.

Since many of the "statements" and "allusions" he is referring to are his own reconstructions, such reliability in either direction is arrived at through a self-fulfilling process. Eisler also allows that the portrait of Jesus he has thus created may not be entirely authentic due to negative exaggeration on the non-Christian side, but at least he can know more or less what Josephus said. In addition, Eisler feels entitled to fill in the gaps in certain texts (like the Slavonic), gaps which he has identified by drawing on other sources which he believes may reflect the material he regards as having been removed by the Christian censors.

Eisler applies his principle first to the passage in the Slavonic text which speaks of Jesus (the fourth of those eight passages). This is a lengthy passage reminiscent of the *Testimonium* in its opening lines, but thereafter expanding on Jesus' ministry in a way that has little of the Gospel flavor and virtually none of its details. Here is the full text (translation from the Slavonic taken from "Sacred Texts" at: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/gno/gjb/gjb-3.htm>):

IV. The Ministry, Trial and Crucifixion of Jesus.

1. At that time also a man came forward, if even it is fitting to call him a man [simply]. 2. His nature as well as his form were a man's; but his showing forth was more than [that] of a man. 3. His works, that is to say, were godly, and he wrought wonder-deeds amazing and full of power. 4. Therefore it is not possible for me to call him a man [simply], 5. But again, looking at the existence he shared with all, I would also not call him an angel.

6. And all that he wrought through some kind of invisible power, he wrought by word and command. 7. Some said of him, that our first Lawgiver has risen from the dead and shows forth many cures and arts. 8. But others supposed [less definitely] that he is sent by God. 9. Now he opposed himself in much to the Law and did not observe the Sabbath according to ancestral custom. 10. Yet, on the other hand, he did nothing reprehensible nor any crime; but by word solely he effected everything. 11. And many from the folk followed him and received his teachings. 12. Many souls became wavering, supposing that thereby the Jewish tribes would set themselves free from the Roman hands.

13. Now it was his custom often to stop on the Mount of Olives facing the city. 14. And there also he avouched his cures to the people. 15. And there gathered themselves to him of servants a hundred and fifty, but of the folk a multitude. 16. But when they saw his power, that he accomplished everything that he would by word, they urged him that he should enter the city and cut down the Roman soldiers and Pilate and rule over us. 17. But that one scorned it.

18. And thereafter, when knowledge of it came to the Jewish leaders, they gathered together with the High-priest and spake: "We are powerless and weak to withstand the Romans. 19. But as withal the bow is bent, we will go and tell Pilate what we have heard, and we will be without distress, lest if he hear it from others, we be robbed of our substance and ourselves be put to the sword and our children ruined." 20. And they went and told it to Pilate.

21. And he [Pilate] sent and had many of the people cut down. 22. And he had that wonder-doer brought up. And when he had instituted a trial concerning him, he perceived that he is a doer of good, but not an evildoer, nor a revolutionary, nor one who aimed at power, and set him free. 23. He had, you should know, healed his dying wife. 24. And he went to his accustomed place and wrought his accustomed works. 25. And as again more folk gathered themselves together round him, then did he win glory through his works more than all.

26. The teachers of the Law were [therefore] envenomed with envy and gave thirty talents to Pilate, in order that he should put him to death. 27. And he, after he had taken [the money], gave them consent that they should themselves carry out their purpose. 28. And they took him and crucified him according to the ancestral law.

Eisler focuses on Pilate's verdict in verses toward the end. These need to be repeated, using Eisler's own German translation rendered in English by his translator:

...that he was [a benefactor, but not] a malefactor, [nor] a rebel, [nor] covetous of kingship. [And he let him go, for he had healed his dying wife. And after he had gone to his wonted place, he did his wonted works. And when more people again gathered round him, he glorified himself by his action(s) more than all. The scribes were stung with envy and gave Pilate thirty talents to kill him. And he took (it) and gave them liberty to carry out their will (themselves).] And they took him and crucified him [contrary] to the law of (their) fathers.

There can be no question that Eisler is correct in judging that this passage is a Christian product in its bracketed words, first as a refutation of Pilate's supposed judgment of the opposite (read without the negatives), and since the healing of Pilate's wife was a later Christian legend with no basis, as is the implication that Pilate had found Jesus innocent and took a bribe to allow the Jews to execute him. He also argues for the impossibility of Josephus portraying the Jews as the actual crucifiers, but sees this as a later tradition based on literal readings of phrases in Luke and Matthew. The same unlikelihood is found in the spurious *Acts of Pilate*. As Eisler observes, had the Jews been granted permission to kill Jesus, it would have been by stoning, with hanging on a tree only after death.

As for the rest of the passage about Jesus in the Slavonic, Eisler subjects it to a number of small 'corrections' with the help of obscure references in other works, Christian and otherwise, which he thinks throw light on the question. At the same time, he indulges in complementary reasoning such as that statements like "his nature and his form were human" and "given his ordinary nature" would have required some explanatory description. Thus, he says, "(Josephus) must have said more than now appears in the text" (p.392). And so we find ourselves on the road to reaching that description of Jesus which still enjoys life on the Internet.

...and arriving at the Ugly

How does Eisler fill in the supposed gap in both the Slavonic text and the underlying Greek text which he believes once contained that description, a description he sees as grounded in the authentic Josephus? After noting Ernst von Dobschutz' collection of "all extant sources relating to the historical development of the literary portrait of Jesus," and that a number of references to Jesus' appearance occur in the Church Fathers, Eisler focuses first on Andrew of Crete. In the early 8th century he wrote the following in a preserved fragment of a work on image worship:

But moreover the Jew Josephus in like manner narrates that the Lord was seen having connate eyebrows, goodly eyes, long-faced, crooked, well grown, [p.393, quoting the translation by Alexander Haggerty Krappe]

A similar description is found in a number of later works, such as by John of Damascus and others quoting him, along with various obscure Byzantine writers who described Jesus in nearly identical fashion. (See p.618-20, taken from Dobschutz.) Eisler dismisses as "frivolous" the charge by some in his day that they all proceed from Andrew of Crete, who invented it. He also finds the odd subtle indication in a title or scholion (explanatory marginal or interlineal note) that a given text once possessed a physical description of Jesus which seems to have been removed, though his defense of such subtleties can be strained.

Eisler calls attention (p.397) to the extant "Letter of Lentulus" to the Senate of Rome, bearing the inscription "about the form and works of Jesus Christ." It describes Jesus in terms reminiscent of the *Testimonium*, but with added material including physical descriptions, which Eisler links with the Slavonic Jesus passage and its reputed censored and deleted portions. He deduces that it was originally cast as a letter by Pilate (for which there is some manuscript support), one describing Jesus' physical appearance in terms similar to those of Andrew of Crete, quite possibly appended to the spurious *Acts of Pilate* mentioned by Justin and Tertullian. This enables him to date it very early (no one else had previously been able to date it at all), but he is forced to attempt a feasible explanation for why the source was changed from Pilate to the obscure Lentulus. That early dating, even though the work is obviously a Christian fabrication, brings it, he thinks, into the original Josephus orbit, giving yet another clue to what the Jewish historian had actually written about Jesus in his original *Halosis*.

Then there is the alleged genuine *Acts of Pilate* published by the emperor Maximinus in 311 (the "*Memoranda*" mentioned by Eusebius, as discussed in chapter 33). This publication was supposed to have been taken from official Roman archives. Eisler has a long section (p.13f) in which he argues, not too solidly backed, that Roman records were so common and scrupulously kept that the idea that Pilate had written an official account of Jesus' execution—one which could have included a description of Jesus—is not outlandish at all. He judges that these *Acts* (the *Memoranda*), published by the emperor and circulated to public schools to counter a growing and troublesome Christianity, were in fact

genuine, taken from archives almost three centuries old, even though Christians of the time declared them forgeries and destroyed them utterly when they got the chance. Such *Acts*, if genuine, would add fuel to Eisler's fire of a description of Jesus which could be brought back into the 1st century and tentatively connected with Josephus' own supposed description in an original *Testimonium*. As well, he can postulate that these destroyed *Acts* contained a description which was accurate and may represent the basic source of all those later descriptions we find in Andrew of Crete and others, and which are 'evidently' missing from documents like the Slavonic Josephus.

The Letter of Lentulus

From the extant *Testimonium* to the Gospel of John, Eisler hypothesizes an arrest warrant for Jesus drawn up by the Jewish authorities which would, of necessity, "contain as full and complete a description as possible of the person 'wanted'." The Letter of Lentulus has an unsurpassed detailed description of Jesus which Eisler regards as an adoring expansion by a Christian forger of "an extract from Josephus, whose description of Jesus according to the genuine (warrant), or rather the extracts from it in the *commentarii* of Emperor Tiberius, the forger utilized" (p.404). By deleting the most favorable words and phrases in the description given by Lentulus, Eisler reconstructs the Josephan original, an original which supposedly appeared in the initial Slavonic text before it was deleted by Christian censors.

Here is the Letter of Lentulus, as translated by Robert Eisler (p.404):

There has appeared in these times and still is (at large) a man, if it is right to call (him) a man, of great virtue, called Christ whose name is Jesus, who is said by the gentiles to be a prophet of truth, whom his disciples call Son of God, raising the dead and healing all diseases: a man of stature, tall, medium, i.e. fifteen palms and a half and slightly, having a venerable face, which beholders might love and dread, having hair of the colour of an unripe hazel and smooth almost to the ears, but from the ears down corkscrew curls somewhat darker-coloured and more glistening, waving downwards from the shoulders, having a parting on the middle of his head after the manner of the Naziraeans, a brow smooth and most serene, with a face without a wrinkle or spot, beautified by a (moderately) ruddy colour; with nose and mouth there is no fault whatever. Having a beard copious but immature, of the same colour as the hair (and) not long but parted in the middle. Having a simple and mature aspect, with blue eyes of varying hue and bright. In rebuke terrible, in admonition bland and amiable. Cheerful, yet preserving gravity: he sometimes wept, but never laughed. In stature of body tall and erect: having hands and arms delectable to the sight. In converse grave, sweet and modest, so that justly according to the prophet was he called beauteous above the sons of men. For he is the king of glory, upon whom angels desire to look, at whose beauty sun and moon marvel, the saviour of the world, the author of life: to him be honour and glory for ever, Amen.

Eisler simply eliminates all the complimentary words and phrases from the Letter of Lentulus on the assumption that they were Christian additions, leaving the 'authentic' description quite unflattering, most of which goes into his own reconstruction. The "(at large)" in the first line is Eisler casting this as Josephus drawing on an arrest warrant for Jesus which he supposedly found in the Roman archives.

The Portrait

But we have not yet arrived at Eisler's ultimate portrait of Jesus. While there are inconsistencies and even contradictions in the descriptions of both Lentulus and Andrew of Crete—a beard said to be both copious and immature, a height both tall and bent—they do not reach the degree of outright ugliness found in Eisler's reconstruction, since in keeping with his methodological principles he has jettisoned the attractive and retained the unattractive; the latter, he maintains, were censored by the Church due to their uninspiring nature.

Various comments in the record portray Jesus as of a height anywhere from virtually a dwarf to a commanding six feet. Eisler chooses the former as more accurate. Some have Jesus' eyebrows meeting in the middle which signified in ancient times something frightening, like a vampire or werewolf; accordingly, that aspect of the various descriptions goes into Eisler's pot. As he says, "A tentative restoration of the text must therefore clearly start from the principle that the *lectio difficilior*, the one which would give offence to believing Christians and to their Hellenistic ideal of male beauty, must be retained." Since Jesus in some documents was given a "twin" by the name of Thomas, who was portrayed in the *Acts of Thomas* as small in stature, therefore Jesus was too. (Even his mother Mary, according to Andrew of Crete, was short.) Going even further, Eisler interprets certain phrases as "obvious modifications" of "hunchbacked," and thus Jesus becomes another Quasimodo.

The proverb "Physician, heal thyself," referred to by Jesus during his reading of the Isaian prophecies about healing (Lk. 4:23), is interpreted as referring to the deformities Jesus himself possessed even as he healed them in others. This is a strained reading, since the contrast in the Lukan passage is between the miracles Jesus performed in Capernaum and his failure or refusal to perform any in his hometown of Nazareth. The example given in 4:25-26, about Elijah going abroad to perform his miracles, demonstrates this clearly.

Eisler recognizes the incongruity, but prefers to postulate that something is missing from the text rather than see that the proverb is simply not a good fit to the point being made by Luke, or that it is hardly reasonable that an evangelist would insert a veiled reference (here alone in all the Gospels) to Jesus' striking deformity in the midst of a passage which is otherwise entirely devoted to the question of a prophet not being recognized in his own country. Through this atomistic misreading, Eisler's imagination is opened to "some infirmity which he might be mockingly called upon to heal; and...that this infirmity must have been visible to all and so striking that the taunt would rise to the lips of all who looked upon the speaker"—namely, that he was hunchbacked.

Skin and hair color are likewise determined through various reasonings. As being more derogatory, the term "scanty-haired" in the Byzantine writers is "consequently genuine," but worn in Nazirite fashion, parted in the middle according to Lentulus' letter. Because "long-nosed" has been 'altered' to "well-nosed" in a post-Andrew source, the former must be accurate.

And so we arrive at Eisler's reconstructed portrait of Jesus as ultimately traced back through a myriad of records across a thousand years to be placed on the very doorstep of Josephus himself. He introduces it as part of the larger reconstructed insertion in the Slavonic text as it was supposedly drawn from and would have appeared in the original *Jewish War* which Josephus called "*The Capture of Jerusalem*," or the "*Halosis*." He sandwiches it between the two sections on "tumults" caused by Pilate over the effigies and the aqueducts, those equivalent to the first two sections of chapter 3 in Book 18 of the *Antiquities* which precede the *Testimonium*.

Eisler's first paragraph of this reconstruction, an expansion of the existing first paragraph of the Slavonic Josephus passage, reads, with the description of Jesus in italics:

At that time, too, there appeared a certain man of magical power, if it is permissible to call him a man, whom (certain) Greeks call a son of God, but his disciples the true prophet, (said to) raise the dead and heal all diseases. His nature and his form were human; *a man of simple appearance, mature age, small stature, three cubits high, hunchbacked, with a long face, long nose, and meeting eyebrows, so that they who see him might be affrighted, with scanty hair (but) with a parting in the middle of his head, after the manner of the Nazirites, and with an undeveloped beard.* Only in semblance was he superhuman, (for) he gave some astonishing and spectacular exhibitions. But again, if I look at his commonplace physique I (for one) cannot call him an angel.... [*Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist*, p.466-7]

Isaiah the 'Prophet' of the Description

None of this description, nor any within the various sources Eisler draws on, is to be found in the Gospels, let alone the New Testament epistles, nor indeed in any Christian writing for the first century and a half of the movement. Where all of this material actually came from can be deduced from the earliest Christian commentator to offer a physical description of Jesus: Tertullian, beginning with his *On the Flesh of Christ*, chapter 9. This passage is sometimes quoted in support of accepting Eisler's reconstruction—but not in its entirety, for the latter parts clearly show where Tertullian is obtaining his ideas, and it is not from Christian historical tradition, or Josephus. He is countering the Gnostic claim that Jesus' constitution was a heavenly one, something infused with divinity and spiritual splendor, an astral substance:

But if there had been in Him any new kind of flesh miraculously obtained (from the stars), it would have been certainly well known. As the case stood, however, it was actually the ordinary condition of His terrene flesh which

made all things else about Him wonderful, as when they said, "Whence hath this man this wisdom and these mighty works?" Thus spake even they who despised His outward form. His body did not reach even to human beauty, to say nothing of heavenly glory. *Had the prophets given us no information whatever concerning his ignoble appearance,* His very sufferings and the very contumely He endured bespeak it all. [translation from *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol.3, p.530; emphases mine, here and below]

Tertullian is clearly saying that Christians had no information about Jesus' appearance outside of 'prophecies' found in the Jewish scriptures. In his *Against Marcion*, Book 3, chapter 17, this source is laid out even more clearly:

Let us compare with Scripture the rest of His dispensation. Whatever that poor despised body may be, because it was an object of touch and sight, it shall be my Christ, be He inglorious, be He ignoble, be He dishonoured; *for such was it announced that he should be*, both in bodily condition and aspect. *Isaiah comes to our help again:* "We have announced (His way) before Him" says he; "He is like a servant, like a root in a dry ground; He hath no form nor comeliness; we saw Him, and He had neither form nor beauty; but his Form was despised, marred above all men." Similarly the Father addressed the Son just before: "Inasmuch as many will be astonished at Thee, so also will Thy beauty be without glory from men." [*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol.3, p.335]

Tertullian seems to embrace and even exaggerate Jesus' supposed ugliness as something psychologically satisfying, a defensive propensity which may have been operating in many Christians through the centuries of persecution and ridicule. It was a denial of the world and its standards, placing in their stead, as several of these commentators do, the more exalted state of spiritual beauty and righteous perfection. Isaiah has conveniently offered them that option. We need see no derogatory remarks by Josephus behind any of it.

Tertullian has said that we know of Jesus' appearance through the prophets, not through any historical tradition, and certainly not from Josephus. If an envisioning of Jesus' appearance arose in the Christian community in the 2nd century once the Gospels were established as history, the simplest explanation is that it formed under the influence of scripture, just as did so much else about Jesus' imagined words and deeds. The Suffering Servant Song of Isaiah 53 was the kingmaker. Not that Eisler himself was ignorant of this connection (*op.cit.*, p.417). He envisions Jesus as "probably" appealing to the Isaian passage as a testament to his own deformity and proof of his destiny, one who "is said to have 'no form or comeliness,' crooked and shriveled like 'a root in a dry ground,' 'a man of sorrow and acquainted with sickness, despised and rejected of men... smitten of God and afflicted, yet wounded for their transgressions'."

The testimony of Origen renders this scriptural source even clearer. Early in *Contra Celsum* (Bk. I, ch. 69), he reports Celsus as saying: "The body of god would not have been so generated as you, O Jesus, were." Here, Celsus is not specific as to why Jesus' body was less than godlike, but Origen seems to agree

that it was not. He too, however, would seem to be basing that opinion on Isaiah. In his discussion as to the nature of Jesus' body, he declares it to have been without sin: "For it is distinctly clear to us that 'He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth; and as one who knew no sin,' God delivered Him up as pure for all who had sinned." Those phrases, once again, are from Isaiah 53. Jesus' sinlessness is determined not by any historical report of the man himself, but through knowledge bestowed by those who had prophesied him.

Then later in *Contra Celsum* (VI, 75), the scriptural source for Jesus' description emerges unmistakably, and not only in regard to Origen himself. While one might think it reasonable that Celsus (in the 170s) could have picked up his ideas about Jesus' appearance from current Christian thought, even if the latter were based on scripture, Origen does not indicate this. In fact, he attributes Celsus' view of Jesus as itself derived directly from scripture by the pagan critic. Consider the passage. Celsus has maintained that if "a divine spirit inhabited Jesus' body" it must have possessed grandeur, beauty and impressiveness; it should have possessed a quality beyond others. Yet, he scoffs,

this person [Jesus] did not differ in any respect from another, but was, as they report, little, and ill-favored, and ignoble.

Does Origen take this as Celsus reporting Christian hearsay of the day? Quite the contrary, he makes this accusation:

...when Celsus wishes to bring a charge against Jesus, he adduces the sacred writings, as one who believed them to be writings apparently fitted to afford a handle for a charge against Him.

In other words, Origen accuses Celsus of putting the worst cast he can on scriptural prophecy about Jesus.

There are, indeed, admitted to be recorded some statements respecting the body of Jesus having been 'ill-favored;' not, however, 'ignoble,' as has been stated, nor is there any certain evidence that he was 'little.' The language of Isaiah runs as follows, who prophesied regarding Him...

And Origen launches into selected quotes from the Suffering Servant Song, admitting that Isaiah bespoke his lack of beauty, "inferior to the sons of men." But against this, he accuses Celsus of ignoring other passages which create a more attractive picture, and he points to the 45th Psalm with its reference to "Thy comeliness and beauty." Between the two, he makes this remark:

These passages [of Isaiah], then, Celsus listened to, because he thought they were of use to him in bringing a charge [of ugliness] against Jesus.

There can hardly be better evidence that descriptions of Jesus, in both Celsus' and Origen's time, were entirely dependent on scripture, and accepted to be so. If traditions about Jesus' appearance were current in the 2nd and 3rd centuries which Christians believed were orally transmitted from the time of Jesus himself, Origen would hardly assume that even the pagan Celsus had to have taken his picture of Jesus from scripture. Tertullian would not have made the remarks he

did as to not knowing anything about Jesus' appearance if the prophets had not revealed it. (As to whether Celsus had actually derived his impression of Jesus from scripture, it may be doubted that he had delved that deeply, though Origen certainly assumed so. It is more likely that he indeed picked them up from Christian opinion which itself had derived it from scripture.)

We can regard it as utterly unlikely that, if an historical Jesus had existed, absolutely no traditions about his appearance would have developed during his life, to be remembered and passed on through oral or written channels, or that nothing about his appearance from whatever source would be found in Christian writings until the beginning of the 3rd century. Eisler's entire thesis has been brought low by the clear indication in the earliest record on the subject that any portrait of Jesus has been derived entirely from the sacred writings. The supreme irony is that today's critical scholarship of the Old Testament has rejected the very concept of the ancient prophets speaking of anything but their own times and their own Jewish expectations of the future—usually an immediate one.

While Eisler's book-long argument has been complex, wide-ranging and adventurous, managing to touch on more writers, documents, obscure figures and astonishing arcana than perhaps anything else between two covers in modern scholarship, the flaws in his process are plain. There is an almost embarrassing naivete inherent in the summing up of his methodology:

As will be seen, this composite text has been obtained by no 'witchery' whatever, but by simply separating all portions favourable to Jesus, and therefore *a priori* to be suspected as of Christian origin, from the text of the *Halosis*, from the quotations from Josephus found in certain Byzantine chroniclers and the letter of Lentulus shown to have drawn on the text of Josephus, and by putting together the material thus left. To believe that a narrative so coherent and logical can be a mere play of accident is to believe the impossible. [*Messiah Jesus*, p.430]

But the logical coherence has been manipulated by Eisler; and his complete ignoring of the likely role of scripture in the initial formulation of this portrait is a profound shortsightedness. Those today who have seized on that description of Jesus as reliably founded, or deduced from it that Jesus must have existed because no one would "make up" a description like that for the founder of their faith, have evidently not followed Eisler's subjective and tortuous route in arriving at it, and have not given various parts of the process the skepticism they deserve. They have not taken into account the lateness of its development; indeed, Eisler has drawn it from the Christian future and retrojected it into the past. And they have not recognized all which points to the inspiration for it being that which has proven to be the source of so much early Christian doctrine and expression, encompassing even the Gospels with their pervasive building blocks of midrash: the Jewish scriptures.

NOTES

Introduction (pages 1 to 12)

- ¹ [page 1] The terms "CE" and "BCE" stand for "the Common Era" and "Before the Common Era," a substitution for A.D. and B.C. which in international scholarly work are considered too specific to a Christian world view.
- [page 5] Traditions: In this context, anything to do with beliefs, customs, teachings, experiences, perceived memories which are preserved by a group or cultural entity, either orally or in writing, and passed on to others over time. Thus, while the singular "tradition" can refer to one of those elements, it can also refer to the collectivity of such things, or the collective ethos of a group or entity.
- ³ [page 4] Hellenistic: the period and characteristics of the ancient civilization in the eastern Mediterranean and Near East following the conquests of Alexander the Great in the 4th century BCE, extending to and beyond the Roman conquests in that area in the latter 1st century BCE. It was marked by the superimposition of Greek culture on the older states of the Near East, with particular focus on the larger cities such as Alexandria (in Egypt), Antioch (NE corner of the Mediterranean), and Ephesus (west coast of Asia Minor/Turkey).
- ⁴ [page 5] The Christian New Testament is comprised of two main categories of documents. In the first category, the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, are regarded as giving testimony to Jesus' life and death, while the Acts of the Apostles purports to describe the immediate response to those events and the course of the first few decades of the apostolic movement, much of it centering on Paul. Although the Gospels are incompatible with each other in many of their details, they and Acts have been regarded for almost two millennia as essentially historically reliable. However, modern scholars no longer consider the Gospels to have been written in the initial apostolic period, and the traditional names attached to them are not regarded as an accurate identification of their authors.

The term "gospel" is the English translation of the Greek term *euangelion*, meaning "good news." (While there are more academic ways of transliterating Greek, I have adopted the style which best reflects an English pronunciation equivalent. The o and e represent the long forms of vowels, being separate letters in Greek, the former of "o" as in "rose," the latter of "a" as in "stage.") In the literature it refers to the orally preached message of apostles like Paul, in which case it is spelled with a small 'g'; or it refers to the written accounts of Jesus' life and death embodying that message, in which case it is spelled with a capital 'G'. By the end of the 2nd century, many more Gospels than the canonical four were in circulation among various Christian groups across the empire. Most of that extensive catalogue has been lost, or is preserved only in unearthed fragments or quotations in the early Christian writers. Most were judged heretical or inferior to the chosen four and were eventually suppressed. While Mark, Matthew, Luke and John are written in narrative form, many non-canonical Gospels comprised sayings collections or dialogues without a narrative framework.

The second category within the New Testament is a miscellaneous collection of epistles. While the "epistle" comprises the form of a letter, usually to some community or other, it was designed to be read out to the congregation of that community and often embodied teaching or polemical material. More will be said on the nature of the epistles in chapter 1. Most of the epistles of the New Testament are attributed to Paul, others to apostles who appear in the Gospels as followers of Jesus, or to reputed relatives of Jesus. In ancient times, the epistle to the Hebrews became assigned to Paul, but later was regarded as anonymous. Its final verses (13:22f), with their Pauline references, can be shown to be a later addition (see Appendix 4). The New Testament closes with the Apocalypse of John, also known as "Revelation," a prophecy of the future cataclysmic overthrow of the present age and world order.

⁵ **[page 8]** My thanks to Jay Raskin (a Doctor in Philosophy and a good example of the new breed of Internet-based scholars), in his very adventurous book, *The Evolution of Christs and Christianities* (p.39f), for pointing out this feature of Eusebius' thinking. It is to Eusebius that we owe our basic picture of Christian history in the first few centuries, a picture which is unfortunately far from secure or trustworthy.

⁶ **[page 11]** See Charlotte Allen, "Confucius and the Scholars," *Atlantic Monthly*, April 1999, p.79-83. From that article: "Most Sinologists these days would agree that Confucius, if he existed at all, has left little concrete evidence of what he was like, and that the traditional biographical material associated with him is largely legend. It is also accepted academic wisdom that the *Analects* (...a collection of 497 sayings and short dialogues written down by his disciples after his death...) was put together over several generations....If it turns out that Confucius never existed, or that the *Analects* was composed over several centuries, the faith of many New Confucians is likely to be rattled a bit but not destroyed."

Allen summarizes Professor Lionel M. Jensen's view (*Manufacturing Confucianism: Chinese Traditions and Universal Civilization*) that it was the Jesuits in the late 16th century who turned "the spiritual and ethical traditions of the *ru*, China's elite scholarly class...(into) a full-fledged religion centered on the person of its supposed founder, Confucius...using the model of Christian theology, which centers on the person of Jesus Christ." An invented founder used to recast the traditions of another invented founder? As we go through this book, the similarities in the Christian situation will become evident, as will the universal human tendency to impute national and religious traditions which originate in multiple sources over a period of time to a single innovator at a single point in history.

Chapter 1: A Heavenly Christ (pages 15 to 24)

⁷

[page 16] More radical views of the Pauline corpus regard even fewer letters as genuine, or none at all. Such an interpretation goes back to F. C. Baur and the Dutch Radical School of the 19th century, but has made a comeback in some circles today. While it is likely that liberal scholarship will eventually enlarge the extent of later editing and interpolation it would allow within some of the "genuine" letters of Paul, it is too soon to overthrow the basic reliability of the

standard seven. I regard them as in principle defensible, and in this book accept their core authenticity (as I do the very existence of Paul).

[page 21] The term "mythological" as employed in New Testament studies can have a more specific meaning than the popular sense of relating to legends or mythical stories. It refers to features given to deities, spiritual forces, etc. which relate to their functioning in the heavenly world or in relation to other spiritual things. For example, saying that Jesus was "pre-existent" with God in heaven before the creation of the world or that he gained power over the spirit forces in the heavens are "mythological" features. There may be some variance in usage among commentators, but this is the way the term will be used in this book.

[page 22] Some aspects of the Buddha in later philosophy about him might be said to rival the divine Jesus in scope, but these took much longer to develop after the Buddha's passing. The figure of Ali in early Moslem history assumed elevated proportions soon after his death, but not to the exclusion of all else.

[page 22] Biblical anthropomorphisms (human concepts and images applied to God) have been rooted out by writers such as Philo of Alexandria and the translators of the Targums (versions of the Hebrew bible in Aramaic) because it was regarded as unseemly to represent God as possessing human attributes. James Dunn (*The Parting of the Ways*, p. 188f) notes that Paul shows not the slightest discomfort in applying to Jesus passages from the Hebrew scriptures which originally referred to God. The hymn in Philippians 2:6-11 is a clear echo, he says, of Isaiah 45:23, which is "one of the strongest assertions of Jewish monotheism in the whole of the scriptures." He goes on to declare: "That a Jew should use such a text of a man who recently lived in Palestine is truly astonishing." Apologists use this as a 'proof that something very remarkable had to have happened—namely, the resurrection—to produce such an astonishing reaction, but by far the simpler explanation is that no such reaction to a man took place, especially when the early record does not present it. Those apologists maintain that if the Jesus of history did not exist, or if he was not essentially as the Gospels portray him, "the origin of the faith of the early Christians remains a perplexing mystery" (Eddy and Boyd, *The Jesus Legend*, p.233). But such a view is too narrow, the perplexity determined by preconception. This book is aimed at broadening those horizons and explaining the 'mystery.'

[page 23] In *Who Wrote the New Testament?* Burton Mack judges the group in Jerusalem around Peter and James as "not a congregation of the Christ cult kind" (p. 103). This suggestion, that the Jerusalem apostles did not regard Jesus as divine, is increasingly common but not borne out by the evidence in Paul. In 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 Paul not only links the Jerusalem group with his own gospel that Jesus had died for sin and risen (elements which are part of the "cultic" picture), he gives no indication that their view of Jesus differed so fundamentally from his own. It is hardly possible that if Peter had no concept of Jesus as God, he would associate with a man who was doing something that would have been horrifying to Jewish loyalties and sensibilities. The issue in Galatians 2, over whether gentile converts had to observe the Jewish Law, would be insignificant beside the dispute that would have set Peter and Paul at each other's throats over whether a Galilean preacher should be converted into a part of God Himself.

12

[page 24] It is ironic that the case mounted by apologists Eddy and Boyd (*op.cit.*, p.94f) against the likelihood that early Christian views of Jesus were influenced by pagan philosophy and religion concerning savior gods and other divine entities rests so heavily upon the immediacy of the elevation of Jesus to such status—supposedly right after his earthly death and resurrection. They quote Richard Bauckham: "The earliest Christology was already the highest Christology." This is very true, and among Jews and with such speed it is hardly credible. Yet rather than appeal to the actual divinity and resurrection of a human Jesus as thereby proven, it is observations like these which should indicate that the christology was high at the beginning of the movement because the Christ of whom it spoke was nothing *but* a divinity.

Chapter 2: A Conspiracy of Silence (pages 25 to 34)

13

[page 27] One passage often appealed to as a declaration by Paul that he has abandoned interest in Jesus' earthly life is 2 Corinthians 5:16. But not all translations understand it that way, and such an interpretation is not justified when the passage is examined, which will be done in a later chapter.

14

[page 28] The Jesus Seminar, formerly led by the late Robert W. Funk, is an association of New Testament scholars based in California, formed in the 1980s to apply modern critical analysis to the documents of the Christian record. The Seminar spent several years judging the likelihood of authenticity for the sayings attributed to Jesus in early Christian writings, followed by a few years on the historical authenticity of the acts attributed to Jesus, including the resurrection. Its profile has been lower in the last several years, though it is still active.

15

[Page 30] See Burton Mack, *A Myth of Innocence*, p.87, n.7; Werner Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel*, p.206: "These sayings could have come from Jesus, but they could just as well have been prophetically functioning sayings of the Risen Lord." Rudolf Bultmann, in a classic statement of the idea (*History of the Synoptic Tradition*, p. 127), refers to certain prophetic sayings in the Gospels:

The Church drew no distinction between such utterances by Christian prophets and the sayings of Jesus in the tradition, for the reason that even the dominical sayings in the tradition were not the pronouncements of past authority, but sayings of the risen Lord, who is always a contemporary for the Church.

This common type of rationalization, that the early Church did not differentiate between the words of the Risen Lord and the teachings of Jesus on earth, simply masks the fact that the idea of the latter nowhere appears in the early record.

Chapter 4: Apostles and Ministries (pages 41 to 50)

16

[Page 42] The Greek has the pronoun "he" in this sentence, but most translations insert "God" based on the context and Paul's practice; others leave the "he" but none I am aware of read it as "Jesus."

17

[page 42] At times Paul refers to a vision of Christ (though nothing on the scale of Acts' Damascus Road experience, which he never mentions), but in most cases he declares that his calling and his gospel come from God (e.g., Gal. 1:16,

1 Cor. 1:1, 2 Cor. 1:1, 3:6, 10:13, 1 Thess. 2:4, Rom. 1:1; cf. Col. 1:25, Eph. 1:1, Tit. 1:3).

18 [page 43] The only rival apostle named by Paul is Apollos of Alexandria, who also appears in Acts 18:24-28. In 1 Corinthians 1 and 2, Paul speaks of "cliques" which have formed among the Corinthians around himself and around Apollos. (Many scholars doubt the literal actuality of a group around "Peter.") He goes on (1 Cor. 1:18-24) to defend his position against those who do not subscribe to his 'theology of the cross' (i.e., the fact of "Christ having been crucified" [1:23], not merely an interpretation of it), which he calls "the wisdom of God" as opposed to "the wisdom of the world." I have argued that this attack is directed at other Christian apostles who do not believe in a sacrificial Son but rather in a Son who is a Revealer of wisdom, and this includes Apollos himself. This entire passage (and its follow-up in chapter 3) is a response to the challenge in Corinth from Apollos' preaching, and thus we can assume that Paul has not gone off on some tangent of criticizing an opposition which has no connection with Apollos. (See my website Supplementary Article No. 1, "Apollos of Alexandria and the Early Christian Apostolate," at <http://jesuspuzzle.humanists.net/supp01.htm>.)

19 [page 43] Note that this appearance in 1 Cor. 15:5 is to the full Twelve. If these were the Gospel Twelve and that account were correct—Judas having dropped out (at the end of a rope)—it would only have been to eleven. More than one commentator has fussed over this little 'inaccurate detail' (e.g., E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, p.277). Even the term in Acts 6:2, imbedded in a piece of tradition whose reliability is shaky, seems ambiguous. Judging by this reference in Acts, one might postulate that the Twelve are a group within the Jerusalem sect who are charged with certain duties, and that their number was chosen as a symbolic representation of the twelve tribes of Israel. They may also have had a symbolic function anticipating the coming Parousia, for the Gospels record the apocalyptic expectation that the Apostles shall sit on twelve thrones to judge the world when Jesus returns as the Son of Man.

The same symbol of the twelve tribes is undoubtedly the source of the idea we find in Revelation 21:14, the only clear mention of "the twelve" as apostles in the first century, and that right at its end. Yet Revelation gives us no historical Jesus, and such apostles need not be linked to an earthly Master. That "twelve" is a mystic number and not a part of history is shown by the context: the heavenly Jerusalem possesses twelve gates bearing the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, and a city wall with twelve foundation stones; upon these stones are inscribed "the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." It was probably such symbolic thinking which created the tradition that Jesus had twelve apostles, with the added factor that some body—possibly administrative—in the primitive church had been labeled the Twelve.

20 [Page44] Hyam Maccoby (*Paul and Hellenism*, p.92) says: "In any case, the expressions *paralambanein* and *paradidonai* are not necessarily derived from the Hebrew *qibel* and *masar* [the 'transmitting' and 'receiving' of tradition in Jewish parlance]. As Albert Schweitzer pointed out, these expressions were used in the mystery religions to signify the reception and communication of the revelation received. Schweitzer rejected this derivation [i.e., Paul from the

mystery religions] because, in his view, Paul 'did not live in a world of Hellenistic conceptions'. But this is a view that can be seriously questioned." Indeed it can, and it is being questioned in this book as well. Maccoby's quote from Schweitzer is in the latter's *Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, ET 1956, p.266. Unfortunately, Schweitzer did not cite specific sources.

[page 46] Paul goes on to emphasize that he got his gospel from no one else by pointing out that he would have had little opportunity to do so. This is why he goes to the trouble of telling the Galatians that after his conversion he did not "go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before me" (1:17) but went off to Arabia for three years. Then when he did go to Jerusalem, he makes the further point that while he was there he saw none of the apostles except for Peter and James, and he swears that this is the truth. None of this information and swearing would be necessary or relevant were he not seeking to strengthen his claim that he did not get his gospel about Jesus from other men, in this case from the Jerusalem group. He would hardly need to defend himself against deriving it from Peter and James if all he were referring to was freedom for gentiles from circumcision and the Law—something they were not likely to be advocating.

[page 46] For example, "According to the newspaper this morning, the President went to Chicago." The President is not fulfilling the newspaper account, that account is informing the reader of the President's actions. Just as scripture informed Paul about the Christ and his activities.

This is also an indicator of the nature of 'revelation' in the early Christian movement. In most cases, we need not envision anything as dramatic as visions or voices accompanied by bright lights and other special effects. A simple inner conviction and perhaps a sense of some spiritual presence during meditation or perusing scripture was likely all that was needed. (I am reminded of the scene in the film *Amadeus*, in which the mediocre composer Salieri is at his harpsichord composing his latest mediocre opera, and when he comes up with a melody he feels is particularly worthy—i.e., less banal than his usual output—he turns to a nearby crucifix and says "Thank-you." I think that may be not much less than the usual kind of 'revelation' early Christians seem to bandy about; we need merely substitute a copy of the Hebrew bible for an 18th century harpsichord.)

[page 48] In Romans 6:3 Paul asks: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into his death?" We have no reason to think that this sort of mystical idea (and Paul has many of them) is anything but Paul's own. It is not found anywhere else, including the Gospels and the non-Pauline epistles, nor in the entire Christian literature of the 2nd century. Thus, what Paul is 'handing over' is his own particular 'take' on the revealed Christ; it comes from no one else.

[page 48] Some scholars have offered a way around the apparent problem. Paul, they claim, is not saying that he heard this from Jesus' own mouth, but that he received an account from others of words which *derived* from Jesus. In other words, "from the Lord Jesus" (*apo tou kuriou*) refers to the "remote antecedent," the originator of the information being passed on, so that a more accurate translation of Paul's meaning might be: "I received (words) of the Lord (through others) which I passed on to you..."

Much of this argument hinges on the use of the preposition *apo* ("from"). A different preposition, *para* (also "from"), is usually used when a writer or speaker is referring to the immediate source of the thing received, such as someone who has told him something directly; whereas *apo* is more frequently used when referring to the ultimate source of the information, passed through some intervening stage of transmission.

The problem with this solution is that these usages were not strict, and right in the Gospels we can find cases where *apo* is used to refer to the *immediate* source, such as Matthew 11:29 where Jesus says: "Take my yoke upon you and learn *from* me." In Colossians 1:7 we find the same thing: "You learned (God's truth) *from* Epaphras." Thus, nothing prevents us from taking "*apo tou kuriou*" (from the Lord) as referring to a direct reception of information from Christ himself by Paul—which can only mean in the sense of revelation.

There is an additional consideration. If Paul is referring to Jesus as the remote source, the originator of the saying, he is creating a rather awkward redundancy in this passage. Paul is about to tell his readers that Jesus spoke certain words. Would he have been likely to preface it with a statement which declares that Jesus spoke these words? No, it makes much better sense all round if Paul is saying what the words plainly seem to be saying: that he knows these words of Jesus because he has received a report of them directly from the Lord himself. As such, the passage falls into the same category as Paul's other "words of the Lord," all of which are the product of revelation.

Chapter 5: *Apocalyptic Expectations* (pages 51 to 56)

25

[page 52] The Greek "*apokalupsis*" means "a revelation," with the connotation of uncovering something which God has hitherto hidden from human knowledge. In modern scholarly study of the period, a second word is often brought in to make the phrase "apocalyptic eschatology." The latter word is from the Greek "*to eschaton*" meaning "the end," since the thing being revealed is usually something to do with the end of the world. This End is regarded as imminent and one which will arrive in a cataclysm. In fact, the word "apocalyptic" by itself has come to possess all these connotations and is more often used alone. As a noun, it encompasses the beliefs, the literature, the phenomenon itself in both its Jewish and Christian manifestations.

Ultimately, the type of thought encompassed by this word goes back to Persian Zoroastrianism which expected a violent confrontation on the heavenly scene between the forces of good and the forces of evil. The views of the Essenes, especially those of Qumran whose outlook is perhaps reflected in the Dead Sea Scrolls, are thought to be heavily dependent on Persian apocalyptic antecedents. In the 1st century CE, apocalyptic expectation is also expressed in Jewish documents such as 1 Enoch and 4 Ezra. In Christianity, it comes to a climax in the Gospels and Revelation.

26

[Page 53] A dramatic example of the missing "first coming" is found in Hebrews 10:37. At the same time, 9:27-8 of the same document is claimed to be the one passage in the New Testament epistles which makes reference to a "second coming" (to earth). The latter is by no means sure, and both these passages will be analyzed when the Epistle to the Hebrews is closely examined in chapter 16.

Chapter 6: From Bethlehem to Jerusalem (pages 57 to 70)

27

[page 60] Walter Burkert, in his *Ancient Mystery Cults* (p.45) notes: "The term 'brother,' *adelphos*, is used even at Eleusis for those who receive initiation together." He quotes primary sources (note 77): "Andocides 1.32, Plato *Epistles* VII 333e; Plutarch *Dio* 56..."

28

[page 62] By way of analogy, if I was involved in the Teamsters Union and had contacts with its Head Office, and I wrote a letter to someone detailing my visit to that group, I might refer at one point to the Teamsters members in general, and at another point mention I had lunch with Joe, and also met Frank, a Teamsters member, later that day. The person I'm writing to knows Joe and that he is a member, but needs to have it pointed out that Frank is also a Teamsters member. Paul's language would not have had the luxury of an indefinite article, and if he were writing such a letter he could, following a common grammatical practice, have inserted the definite article between "Frank" and "Teamsters member" no matter what he was or was not implying.

29

[page 63] E. M. Sidebottom (*James, Jude and 2 Peter*, p.79) claims that the absence of a reference to Jesus by James "would be natural in his brother," but this is unsupported by any reasoning as to why this would be so. Helmut Koester (*Introduction to the New Testament*, vol.2, p.247) wonders whether the silence in Jude was "chosen for polemical reasons." What these might have been is not said. J. N. D. Kelly (*The Epistles of Peter and Jude*, p.233) suggests that this same writer's reticence was due to "humility and reserve." Regrettably, the letter itself gives no evidence of such commendable traits, with its doom-laden condemnation of those who follow rival beliefs and practices which make them "brute beasts." Besides, no one would expect or value such "reserve." The "avoidance of presumption," another suggested reason by Kelly, is not a strong characteristic of early Christian writers either.

30

[Page 67] Not only would a preacher of the kingdom be expected to perform miracles, his views on the coming End-time would have been eagerly sought. All these things would have been inseparable within the one package, determined by popular expectation and universal practice among Jewish and Christian prophets. Every Christian document of the 1st century, from Q to the Didache to the New Testament epistles, speaks of some kind of apocalypticism, with miracle working not far behind.

It thus becomes a highly dubious proposition for modern critical scholarship to construct an "authentic Jesus" who has these fundamental elements stripped away. The Jesus Seminar's presentation (working from Q and the Gospel of Thomas) of a teaching sage who is too progressive to indulge in miracle working or too enlightened to share in the apocalyptic expectations of his age, speaks more for the needs and preferences of the modern scholarly mind than it does for any historically accurate picture of a presumed 1st century preacher of the kingdom. Selective interpretation of certain features in teachings like the parables, while ignoring the apocalyptic elements which stand alongside them, has served to highlight and impute to Jesus the concept of "the kingdom within you now," while divorcing it from the less enlightened (to our minds) dimensions of End-time anticipation and hopes that were the mark of the period.

We shall see that the 'prophetic' layer of the Q document (Q2) contained both apocalyptic preaching and traditions of miracle working, including raisings from the dead (see Luke/Q 7:22). These things modern critical scholarship generally regards as having been imputed—falsely—to Jesus as early as the 50s of the 1st century. (My own view will be seen to differ.) All these observations show that if Jesus had been an historical figure preaching the kingdom of God, traditions about him working miracles and forecasting the End-time would have started to circulate early on, and should have been accessible to writers like Paul and the author of the epistle of James.

31 *[page 69]* These arguments concerning Hebrews 13:11-14 are discussed at length in my Supplementary Article No. 14, "The Cosmic Christ of the Epistle to the Hebrews," Part Three, at: <http://jesuspuzzle.humanists.net/suppl4Three.htm>.

32 *[page 69]* Because the Temple was a volatile place, with Roman soldiers always stationed in the immediate vicinity (the major Jerusalem fortress, the Antonia with its Roman garrison, overlooked the Temple itself), some scholars, e.g., F. W. Beare, in his *Commentary on Matthew*, p.416, argue for the impossibility of such an incident. For similar reasons, it is impossible to believe that Jesus could have made the described entrance into the city on Palm Sunday, since any such incident with its treatment of Jesus as a kingly figure would not have escaped the Roman authorities' notice, leading to probable immediate arrest.

33 *[Page70]* Burton Mack (*Who Wrote the New Testament?* p.87) regards the Last Supper as part of the later mythology about Jesus, and not an actual historical event. He calls this scene "not historical but imaginary," a creation of the Christ cult surrounding meal practice "in keeping with their mythology."

Chapter 7: The Passion Story (pages 71 to 82)

34 *[Page76]* See the March/April 1995 issue of *The Fourth R*, the magazine of the Westar Institute and the Jesus Seminar.

35 *[page 76]* Thus we need not be concerned over the apologetic argument against the likelihood of full-blown hallucination, as these "seeings" do not have to be interpreted in that extreme a fashion. It is far from clear, therefore, that Paul is describing anything more than a series of experiences in which many people, most of them within a group already formed for a religious purpose, felt a conviction of faith in the spiritual Christ, experiences which may well have grown with the telling. We could note, too, that Paul's own "seeing" may not be an account of his conversion experience. When he refers to his conversion, or "call" (usually by God), he never describes it in the dramatic terms of a vision, and certainly not in the way Luke casts the event in Acts when he has Christ appear to Paul on the road to Damascus. Paul's "seeing" in 1 Corinthians may be a 'confirming' experience subsequent to his call, just as the other ones he lists must be, since those apostles were already believers. When self-styled prophets, including modern evangelists, make their claims to speak with the voice of God, they inevitably support and justify those claims by an appeal to personal experiences of that God, to wonders or miracles they have known or been a part of. Paul and the others *needed* the "seeings" he recounts here—and they duly received them.

[page 79] It has also been suggested that verses 5-7 are in some sense liturgical; that they could even be an early creed. But for apologists this runs up against their total incompatibility with the Gospel post-resurrection accounts. There is no sign of the women as the first witnesses to the risen Jesus, nor do the Gospels witness to any 'seeings' by James and the 500 brethren. And how an official creed could have formed this early and yet fail to govern or be reflected in the later Gospel account is difficult to understand. Nor is any echo of it, visionary or otherwise, to be found in any other non-Gospel documents. (The strained suggestion that 'misogynist' outlooks led to a suppression of the role of the women is not only unsavory, it would hardly be feasible during a time when immediate memories of what had really happened would surely have produced objections to such blatant mistakes in an official creed.)

At the other end of the spectrum, a more radical view presents these verses as later interpolations reflecting rivalry between different groups in the early Christian community as to who had been accorded sighting privileges and in what order. But perhaps this reads too much into something which has simply an *ad hoc* feel to it, Paul repeating what may be a not-too-efficiently remembered set of early traditions about experiences of the spiritual Christ.

37

[page 82] See Robert Funk, *Honest to Jesus*, p.237-8; John Dominic Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, p.251; John Shelby Spong, *Liberating the Gospels*, p.249; Burton Mack, *A Myth of Innocence*, ch.9.

Chapter 8: The Word of God in the Holy Book (pages 83 to 90)

38

[page 55] The Septuagint was the Greek translation of the Hebrew bible first made in Ptolemaic Egypt in the 3rd and 2nd centuries BCE. Its abbreviation is "LXX"—Roman numerals for "70" reflecting the legend of its simultaneous translation by 70 independent translators, all of whom came up with the inspired identical wording throughout the entire book. In spite of this miracle, there were significant differences in this translation from the Hebrew original, which has meant that scholars can tell that in virtually all cases in which early Christian writers quote scripture, they are using the Septuagint rather than the Hebrew version.

This can create the curious anomaly that Jesus has the words of the LXX in his mouth, rather than the Hebrew, something that would have been very unlikely had he had a rabbinical background and preached in Aramaic, as most scholars today assume. It has also been their custom to assume that Jesus did not speak Greek, which makes it doubly curious that no traditions of teachings assigned to Jesus seem to have survived and circulated in Aramaic or in something betraying an Aramaic precedent. (That some of the Gospels were originally composed in the Aramaic language is no longer considered tenable.)

39

[page 59] See Barrett's *Epistle to the Romans*, p.20. Also, C. E. B. Cranfield (*International Critical Commentary: Romans*, p.60) allows that *kata* as meaning "in the sphere of" is a possibility, although he prefers to read "*kata sarka*" as encompassing the idea of "ongoing nature," something broader than simply the idea of "in his life span." Cranfield thus inadvertently points to an idea which is non-historical, fitting the timeless realm of myth.

Chapter 9: The Intermediary Son (pages 91 to 96)

40 [page 92] Philo of Alexandria (c25BCE to c50CE) is the foremost example of the input of Greek ideas into Jewish thought, a phenomenon which produced an important type of philosophy and culture during this period, called "Hellenistic Judaism."

41 [page 92] There are those who maintain that "Wisdom" was simply a poetic way of expressing certain of God's activities, but most scholars will admit that the portrayal of Wisdom in the biblical and extra-biblical literature makes her a distinct divine personage. (See Helmer Ringgren, *Word and Wisdom*, p.1 18, 132, etc.) It has even been suggested that Wisdom grew out of an earlier 'consort' figure, a female deity beside Yahweh, whom the not-so-monotheistic Israelites of the 8th century BCE and earlier periods included in their heavenly pantheon, a goddess probably related to the Phoenician Ishtar.

Charles H. Talbert ("The Myth of a Descending-Ascending Redeemer in Mediterranean Antiquity," *New Testament Studies* 22 [1975], p.418-439) regards Philo as a witness to an existing myth in which Wisdom-Logos was treated as a heavenly personal being and a redeemer figure—through bestowing knowledge of God. This myth is reflected in the Alexandrian document, the Wisdom of Solomon, even though Philo, writing around the same time, demythologized the myth by treating it as allegory.

42 [page 94] D. Moody Smith notes (*Harper's Bible Dictionary*, under "Logos") that "it is not immediately obvious why a man sent from God, even the Messiah of Israel, should have played such a role," referring to the Logos' role as God's agent in creating the world. He is so right. That Jews, no less, could assign to a crucified preacher the creation of the universe is beyond belief. But of course they did nothing of the sort. They assigned that role to the spiritual Son in Heaven, just as thinkers before them had assigned it to God's Wisdom and others to the intermediary Logos. The historical man entered the picture only when the heavenly Son was later thought to have come to earth and lived a life told of in the Gospels. Cosmic beliefs about a supposed historical man were much easier to accept when applied long after the 'fact,' and easier still when created by a largely gentile mind.

On the matter of presumed Jewish response to a human Jesus, one of the common observations about groups in the 2nd and 3rd centuries which are styled "Jewish-Christian" is that they did not regard Jesus as a divine figure. The Ebionites, for example, saw Jesus as a prophet Messiah but not the Son of God. But all these groups flourished only after the 1st century, and the record of fragments from their documents (as in Epiphanius and Hippolytus) comes from the 3rd and 4th centuries. There is great difficulty in tracing Ebionite views back into the 1st century, especially to the Jerusalem community known to us through the letters of Paul. It is by no means easy to support views like that of Burton Mack (see note 11), that this original Jerusalem group around Peter and James did not regard Jesus as divine. In fact, Paul provides evidence of the opposite.

Thus, our evidence that Jewish-Christians regarded an historical Jesus as simply a human prophet arises only after the figure contained in the Gospels had come to be widely known and accepted as historical. In fact, certain preserved

fragments suggest that earlier Jewish-Christian sects did indeed envision a heavenly origin for Christ, though not as a Son of God. "They (the Ebionites) say that he was not begotten of God the Father, but was created as one of the archangels...that he rules over the angels and all the creatures of the Almighty." (Epiphanius, *Refutation of All Heresies*, 30.16,4; see Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol.1, p. 158.)

These observations support the view that Jews, as a general rule, would have been unable to identify a human man with God. Once Jesus was brought to earth and given a human identity, Jewish groups who were part of the Christian faith (and carried along like everyone else by the juggernaut of the Gospel Jesus) could no longer accept divinity for such a figure and had to reduce him to human dimensions.

Such an attitude surfaces as early as Justin, whose character Trypho the Jew in his Dialogue with Trypho serves to represent the outlook and opinions toward Christianity current in Justin's day, when the historical Jesus was beginning to make inroads into the thought of the time. In chapter 88, Justin puts these words into Trypho's mouth: "For you utter many blasphemies, in that you seek to persuade us that this crucified man ought to be worshiped." Such an attitude in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, whether among Jews or Jewish-Christians, was not likely to have differed from that of the 1st century, and thus the entire picture of Christianity beginning with a response to a human Jesus by great numbers of Jews—with much of that response happening in distant communities by Jews who had never seen or heard of him before—elevating a crucified man to the status of a pre-existent divinity with all of God's titles, must be dismissed.

43 [page 96] Hugh Montefiore (*Hebrews*, p.63) suggests that this practice of putting scriptural texts into Jesus' mouth was "the tradition of the early church." What he does not recognize is that this tradition was based on the fact that there was no earthly ministry or body of sayings to draw from. Graham Hughes (*Hebrews and Hermeneutics*, p.62) makes the assumption that such Gospel sayings were well known to the author and that he chose to "give expression" to them by appropriating Old Testament "forms" of these sayings. This is an example of the not infrequent practice among commentators of offering a 'definition' which serves to make something seem its opposite. Here, Hughes suggests that the absence of the sayings is really a quotation of the sayings in their 'Old Testament prefigurations.' But if the author wanted to "give expression" to Jesus sayings, why did he not simply quote those sayings?

Chapter 10: Who Crucified Jesus? (pages 97 to 126)

44 [page 99] As in his *Birth and Rebirth, The Myth of the Eternal Return, Myth and Reality*, etc.

45 [page 102] See, for example, Hyam Maccoby, *Paul and Hellenism*; F. W. Beare, *The First Epistle of Peter*, p.57.

46 [page 104] Some of those who judge "rulers of this age" to be a reference to the demon spirits: S. G. F. Brandon (*History, Time and Deity*, p. 167), C. K. Barrett (*First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p.72), Jean Hering (*The First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, p. 16-17), Paula Fredriksen (*From Jesus to Christ*,

p.56), S. D. F. Salmond (*Expositor's Greek Testament: Ephesians*, p.284). Dellling, in the article on "archon" in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (I, p.488-9) regards the phrase "tou aidnos toutou" as an objective, not a temporal genitive, and thus the term is "not, then, referring to earthly rulers" (n.7). Paul Ellingworth (*A Translator's Handbook for 1 Corinthians*, p.46) says: "A majority of scholars think that supernatural powers are intended here."

47 **[page 106]** Save for parts of Books 3 and 4, *De Principiis* ("On the Principles") exists only in a Latin translation of the original Greek, leaving us at times to question what vocabulary Origen used; unfortunately, the extant Greek passages do not include the ones quoted here.

48 **[Page109]** The 'chapter and verse' numbering system for the Gnostic documents discovered at Nag Hammadi in 1945 consists of the page and line numbers, separated by a comma, of the codex (bound volume) in which the document was contained. Many of those codices were in poor condition, with missing leaves and fragmented pages. (The most fragmentary were burnt as kindling by the mother of the Egyptian peasant who found them.)

49 **[page 110]** In his later books, beginning with *The Jesus Myth*, Wells has taken a step in the opposite direction, allowing for the existence of a "Q Jesus," the founder figure which modern scholarship declares can be uncovered at the roots of the Q document. I disagree with that position, and will be arguing against it in the second division of this book.

50 **[page H3]** "The Myth of a Descending-Ascending Redeemer in Mediterranean Antiquity," *New Testament Studies* 22, 1975, p.418-439.

51 **[page 114]** Myths of the descent and ascent of deity are often interpreted (especially in Gnosticism and Neoplatonism) as symbolizing the ancient idea of the fall of the human soul into matter, its suffering and death within that base, imperfect world, followed by a re-ascent into its proper abode and state, an exaltation. The myth of the descending-ascending saving god, the paradigm for the soul's descent and ascent, guarantees this destiny for the initiate who is brought into union with the god.

52 **[Page117]** The modern theological claim that Jesus needed to take on flesh and blood *of the specifically earthly kind* in order to effect salvation is not grounded in the evidence. If that were so, we would have every reason to expect a clear reference to such a requirement in the epistles. In fact, it is first encountered in Ignatius in the early part of the 2nd century. In the letters attributed to him we see him countering both the denial of an actual life of Jesus and the 'compromise' solution of docetism (see chapter 21). In his epistle to the Smyrneans 4-5 he is concerned with the latter, and declares that if Christ's suffering was only illusory, then his own chains and imminent suffering in martyrdom must also be only illusory. On the other hand, almost the entire body of gnostic literature was content with a Christ who had merely the semblance of true humanity and did not suffer at all. As Robert Price points out (*The Pre-Nicene New Testament*, p. 955), the Nag Hammadi document "Melchizedek" insists on actual incarnation rather than the usual gnostic view of Jesus as an otherworldly phantom, but this is something "unparalleled in Gnostic literature."

[page 118] For the suggestion that "death on a cross" is a Pauline addition, see Norman Perrin, Dennis C. Duling, *The New Testament: An Introduction*, (2nd ed.) p.61.

54

[page 118] As a further example of a descending-ascending concept which also precludes knowledge of a life on earth, consider Ephesians 4:9-10. Here the writer makes a cryptic statement, quoting Psalm 68:18 and offering a comment:

"When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men." Now, what does 'he ascended' mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions [alternatively: to the depths of the earth, or, to the regions beneath the earth, as offered respectively by the NIV and NEB], He who descended is himself the very one who ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill the whole universe.

The ambiguity of the Greek allows for it being a reference to a descent to Sheol, which is a primary focus in early Christian documents in declaring that the Son descended to Sheol to rescue the souls of the righteous (see 1 Peter 3:19, the Ascension of Isaiah and the Odes of Solomon). That Sheol is in view here is suggested by two things: the leading of 'captives' into heaven, which sounds like rescued souls; and the idea that Christ filled the whole universe by ascending above all the heavens, since to complement this in the other direction and complete the 'filling' he would have to descend to Sheol *below* the earth, not merely to earth itself. Moreover, the writer seems to be saying that he 'knows' of this descent because of the Psalm's statement that Christ ascended to the highest heavens. If the writer had meant a descent to earth, such a thing would be known through history and tradition; he would not need scripture in order to *deduce* it.

Furthermore, why would earth be overlooked or ignored in this account of Christ's travels? Especially in view of the surrounding context:

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: ...[here, the above quoted verses]... It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers.

This 'giving of gifts' to members of the church, according to the quote of the Psalm, is to be located *after* "he ascended on high." In other words, it was a gift-giving which took place from Heaven by a spiritual Christ. Yet if Christ was known and remembered as having been on earth, such a gift-giving, those appointments, would inevitably be seen as having proceeded from the time of his ministry, with his disciples as the recipients. Instead, the gifts in the above quote clearly belong to the time of the writer (the late 1st century); they relate to an established church and its organization. The following verses go on to speak of building up, through the exercise of these gifts, the "body of Christ until we all reach a unity in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God..." Such faith and knowledge of Christ comes through these mystical gifts and processes, not through historical memory of a recent man on earth.

55

[Page 122] It might be asked why, if the Son was in disguise and resembled the denizens of that region, would Satan and his demons have killed him? This might be a good question, but only in the context of our modern rationality. The

writer, and the thought circles he represents, could well have been unable to answer it to any rational person's satisfaction, certainly not to us who attempt to subject it to logical literary analysis. But it requires the same sort of insight that we ought to bring to all questions of this sort, indeed to the entire literature. We must judge the development of such ideas not by their logicity, but by what was needed, by what would have prompted the formation of those beliefs (as in the idea that the heavenly Christ had to be seen as "arising from David").

In regard to the Ascension, we might trace a pattern of development in this way. Salvation by God can only be provided through an intermediary divine figure, his own emanation, or Son. The mechanism of that salvation has to be a sacrifice, although the "why" of this is never explained. To undergo such a sacrifice the Son must descend into a region where that is possible. There must be an agency performing that sacrifice: who else but evil spiritual forces, who have devoted themselves to challenging and foiling the divine forces of good? Chief among that sacrifice's purpose is the destruction of those demon spirits, the agency of evil and misfortune in the world (God himself cannot be held responsible). Thus the spirits have to *unwittingly* perform the killing, which is made possible by not recognizing the Son's true identity or receiving warning of his approach. Aside, perhaps, from the rationale that evil spirits by nature do evil things, it probably did not trouble those who put all this together that they provided no ostensible or logical reason for the demons to kill this unknown passerby who entered their territory. No more than they were troubled by the larger question of why the Son's killing would effect the release of the righteous. We cannot look for consistent logicity in religious doctrine, although as we progress further into our own era of scientific and intellectual enlightenment, we ought to be able to set aside the product of previous eras' illogicity.

Chapter 11: *The Mystery Cults* (pages 127 to 144)

⁵⁶ [Page 127] For example, Walter Burkert: *Ancient Mystery Cults*, p.3.

⁵⁷ [page 128] This classic interpretation of the mysteries is the "vegetation theory" epitomized by James George Frazer in his *The Golden Bough* early in the 20th century. The gods and the myths and rituals associated with them represented the life-giving round of light and heat governing plant growth, determined by the seasonal movements of the sun. Some modern scholarship maintains that this scenario has been discredited and abandoned, putting forward other principles on which the mysteries could have arisen.

I am somewhat skeptical about the vigor with which the agricultural roots of the mysteries have been tossed out, but this is not to say that refinements have not needed to be made and other factors identified. Walter Otto (see next note) makes the perceptive observation that myths such as that of Demeter seem to embody the principle that life can only arise out of death, that primitive peoples regarded fertility as received from the very hand of death itself—which is why so many ancient myths preceding the mysteries, such as those of Inanna and Tammuz in Mesopotamia and the Phoenician Baal, involved a descent to the underworld to rescue someone from the god of the dead. This motif can also be found in the myth of Demeter, but in all cases there is an important agricultural component present as well. In Mithraism, the death of the bull bestows life and

fertility on the earth. Nor can it be denied that this principle underlies Christian soteriology as well, that resurrection and eternal life is made possible by the death of Jesus and his exaltation, that new life even in this world follows—in the thought of Paul—through "dying to sin" by sharing in Christ's death. The basics of the Christ myth have wide and deep roots.

58

[page 130] Primary sources are quoted by Walter Otto in "The Meaning of the Eleusinian Mysteries," *Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks* (1939), vol.2, "The Mysteries," p. 14-31. As an indication of the threat which this sort of view of the mysteries constitutes, Walter Burkert (*Ancient Mystery Cults*, p.3) declares it a "stereotype" that "the mystery religions are spiritual...the pagan in a search for higher spirituality." For him, this will not do, because "In this view the mystery religions are considered religions of salvation. This would make Christianity just another—indeed, the most successful—of the Oriental mystery religions." Apologetic interest has determined that the mysteries are not allowed to be what they clearly present themselves to be. Of course, in no other way could we understand how the cults could have been so widely respected and valued, and have had such positive emotion invested in them by millions over the centuries, if they did not entail the element of guaranteed benefits, and especially of 'resurrection' from death to a happy afterlife. In other words, they were precisely "religions of salvation."

59

[page 131] Orphics not only focused on an ethical life, they envisioned a judging of the dead which determined their fate in the next world. Considering that Hebrew thought, even after Orphism took shape, contained very little if anything about a fate in an afterworld determined by one's behavior in this one, we can identify this element in Christianity's moral outlook and next-world expectations as something rooted in the Greco-Roman tradition rather than being inherently Judaic. Even the Orphic concept of "hell" with its punishing demons preceded the Judaeo-Christian one. The common accusation that the ancient world had virtually no ethical integrity before Christianity came along is the height of self-righteous fatuity. And this is not taking into account the further sophisticated ethical concerns of groups like the Stoics and Cynics.

60

[page 133] Maria Lancelotti (*Attis: Between Myth and History*, p. 161) admits that evidence in the Attis symbolism suggests the concept of "immortality." Yet she objects that these "could refer to the Netherworld that the dead person is entering rather than to immortality." But where is that immortality enjoyed if not in the Netherworld? Christianity's immortality is to be enjoyed in the Christian "netherworld," namely Heaven. (The fact that one is located in the sky and the other beneath the earth makes no substantive difference.) Lancelotti reveals an apologetic agenda in her comments surrounding the terms used for Attis' revival by the 4th century Firmicus Maternus. For her, they make

particularly clear the distance separating (Attis') 'resurrection' and Christ's. The risks involved in possible similarities between the Attis story and Christ's are thus overcome precisely by demonstrating that the apparent 'similarities' conceal instead an unbridgeable chasm, [p. 158]

But this is a "chasm" of modern scholarship's own defensive excavation, and the "risks" speak of a danger only to Christian faith and exclusivity.

[page 134] The ancients' view of the immovable centrality of the earth (a 'fact' also subscribed to in the bible and throughout Christian history until Copernicus and Galileo) led to the concept of the outer fixed sphere of stars revolving around the earth once a day, as did the sun. But the sun also had an additional movement of its own around the earth once a year, at an angle (the zodiac plane) to the celestial equator of the stars' movement. The intersection points of these two planes were at the equinoxes, and the constellations of stars which appeared at those two points, because of a slight wobble of the earth on its axis, were ever so slowly shifting backwards around the zodiac circle. As Ulansey puts it in an Internet summary article:

Hipparchus's discovery of the precession made it clear that before the Greco-Roman period, in which the spring equinox was in the constellation of Aries the Ram, the spring equinox had last been in Taurus the Bull. Thus, an obvious symbol for the phenomenon of the precession would have been the death of a bull, symbolizing the end of the "Age of Taurus" brought about by the precession. And if the precession was believed to be caused by a new god, then that god would naturally become the agent of the death of the bull: hence, the "bull-slayer."

⁶² [Page 135] The christological hymn of 1 Timothy 3:16 speaks of Christ's 'post-flesh' experience in extremely cursory terms. It is not even "resurrected" or "exalted" but merely "justified/vindicated [*edikaiothe*] in spirit." This should bring to mind a curiosity of the epistles. Much focus is placed on the death of Christ—Paul even suggests that he presented some kind of scenario of it to the Galatians (3:1)—and there is much reference to that death as the saving act; but there is almost a void on the resurrection itself, especially as an 'event.' Where is the attention given to Easter Sunday, to the emergence from the grave, to the empty tomb and the appearances in flesh? No such thing exists in the epistles, not even in Hebrews. There are a few references to God "raising Jesus from the dead" and to the believer being "raised with him" to a new life (a mystical result from a mystical act). Christ's raising guarantees the believer's own in Romans 6:5. But there is no more sign of a focus on this as an 'event' or of it being reflected in ritual observance (much less as a site to be visited) than there is in what we can see about its counterpart in the pagan cults.

This is another alleged difference between the two which simply evaporates. The reason why we can glean so little from the record about the resurrection of a savior god like Osiris or Attis is because it, too, was not an historical 'event' recorded in the myth, not a dramatic return to earth to be portrayed, but only, like the raising of Paul's Jesus, a movement to and within the spiritual world. It is why the discernable aspect of the pagan cults is so prominently the death and ritual mourning element and—no more than in the epistles—not the fate after death. (Osiris actually trumps Paul's Christ, in that he is at least reassembled on earth to function as the progenitor of Horus.)

⁶³ [page 136] The one alleged piece of evidence appealed to, Pliny the Younger's reference in his letter to the emperor Trajan around 112 CE to deserted temples in Bithynia and the drying up of sales of sacrificial animals supposedly due to a vast Christian conversion is too ludicrous to accept as accurate or genuine; nor is

it clear from Pliny's words that the falling off was due to Christianity, especially since the new reversal of that situation is not said to be, nor likely to be, because of the persecution. (This will be further discussed in Chapter 34.)

64 **[page 136]** It is surprising how frequently apologetic appeal is made to the idea that the mystery cults borrowed from Christianity. Certain apologists of the 2nd century and beyond assumed that aspects of the mysteries were in existence before Christianity. Otherwise, there would have been no need for them to 'explain' this by saying that Satan or the demons had counterfeited Christian ritual and doctrine ahead of time so as to confuse potential believers when the real thing came along. (For example, Justin, *First Apology* 54 and 62.) Celsus claimed that the young Christian upstart had borrowed everything from its Greek predecessors. He would hardly have been unaware that in his own lifetime, if we are to believe modern apologists, this upstart he was busy condemning had actually been the fountainhead of major features of the mysteries, that the latter had revised the myths of their own gods to conform to the rites and doctrines of a small and despised sect. As will be seen in chapter 31, almost all the major Christian apologists of the 2nd century failed to declare *any* resurrection of their Logos/Son in presenting a picture of their faith, and one of them even heaped ridicule on the idea of worshiping a crucified man. By any measure, a feasible motivation for the mysteries to copy from Christianity is lacking.

65 **[Page138]** For an extensive critique of Gunter Wagner's *Pauline Baptism and the Pagan Mysteries*, a now-classic and heavily biased attempt to divorce Paul's soteriological thought from any connection with the mysteries, see my website Supplementary Article No. 13, "The Mystery Cults and Christianity: Part Three" at: <http://jesuspuzzle.humanists.net/suppl3C.htm>.

66 **[Page141]** Eddy and Boyd (*op.cit.*, p.219) are particularly concerned to counter such a conclusion. Unfortunately, they do so by begging the question. They refer to the Eucharist as a "shocking metaphor" and admit it would have appalled "Torah-oriented Jews." But instead of considering that such Jews, as many of the early Christians were, would *not* in fact have been a party to such an idolatrous ritual in application to a human man, they argue that, since they *did* so, it must have been "solidly rooted in the authority of the early Jesus." Even a "Torah-true Jew" like Paul was willing to embrace it: ergo, Christians were capable of giving it a "conceptual home within the world of a deeply Jewish covenant theology." The alternative, unacceptable of course, is to conclude that the early church had no such ritual in application to a recent historical man (which is what the evidence looked at indicates), and further that, since even the idea of eating and drinking the mystical body and blood of a spiritual figure would have been blasphemous, Paul's concept of the Lord's Supper was not a Jewish-derived idea, much less compatible with Jewish covenant theology, but a pagan one, specifically from the mysteries.

Chapter 13: Dancing with Katie Sarka under the Moon (pages 157 to 178)

17 **[page 162]** http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/richard_carrier/jesuspuzzle.shtml. While the site name has been changed to "Freethought Rationalist Discussion Board" some older articles have retained the "infidels.org" URL.

[page 162] Carrier's reference to the literal meaning of *kata* with the accusative as implying motion "down" has led to an erroneous idea by some that I regard the phrase in the epistles as describing Christ's actual descent down into the region of flesh. This is not the case. I read no literal motion into it. Such a motion only exists in the background concept of the descent of a god into lower regions, it is not derived from *kata sarka* itself. As Carrier goes on to detail, this inherent motion in *kata* often becomes figurative, and this is one of the senses in which I interpret it, applying both to human and divine situations: "in conformity with," "like / after the fashion of" flesh, "in accordance with / in relation to" flesh, with "flesh" sometimes entailing the idea of sphere or location, namely the fleshly realm of corruptibility below the moon.

I have called attention to C. K. Barrett's translation of *kata sarka* as "in the sphere of the flesh." Whether he means it figuratively ("to do with the world of flesh") or literally in terms of a location ("within the world of flesh") is immaterial. One concept is as valid as the other. As stated, Carrier notes that *kata* can mean "at" or "in the region of," and the latter meaning is also to be found in classical Greek (see Liddell and Scott). If taken as locational, it is also irrelevant whether Barrett sees such a "sphere" as extending up to the moon and encompassing spiritual activities on the part of spirit beings like the demons. He probably does not, but once the locational principle is established, it can be reinterpreted according to one's own view of the evidence. I have not in any way misrepresented Barrett, despite accusations to that effect.

[page 164] Studies of the Apocalypse of Elijah have revealed it to be a layered document, containing both Jewish and Christian passages. Most of the latter (including the passage quoted) may reflect pre-Gospel thought, for they contain nothing suggesting the Gospel scenario. The older Jewish stratum, concerned with the thrones and crowns prepared for those obedient to the Lord (God) and his covenant, with apocalyptic expectations and predictions in the tradition of Daniel, including the "son of lawlessness" (a Jewish precursor idea to the Antichrist), is entirely theocentric, with no suggestion of any presence of a Jesus. (The term "Christ" used in the translation reflects the Greek word for "Messiah" used in the traditional Jewish sense.)

The main Christian insertion is at 3:2-13, describing the future advent of the Christ. "When the Christ comes..." reflects the pre-Gospel expectation of a future coming, not a return. He will be led by "the sign of the cross," an idea which need not imply an historical event but may relate to the initial mythical belief of a heavenly crucifixion. There follows a description of the signs and wonders that will be performed when the son of lawlessness arrives, reflecting the Jewish tradition (and the subsequent Christian one) that this false Messiah will be capable of signs and wonders—with one exception, and this is where an interesting point arises. In one manuscript, the text says: "He will do the works which the Christ *did*, except for raising the dead alone." But the other surviving manuscript reads: "He will do the works which the Christ is *going to do*..." The latter seems to reflect a stage of belief in which the Christ, the true Messiah, has not yet arrived. This would make it the older version of the verse, and a fit with the prophecy of his future coming in 3:2-4 where there is no suggestion of any former appearance on earth.

A comparison with a later portion of the work is also revealing. In 4:31, future opponents of the false Messiah, the son of lawlessness, will say to him: "All powers which the prophets have done from the beginning you have done. But you were unable to raise the dead because you have no power to give life." We may have here a part of the older Jewish stratum, for the writer had only the prophets with whom to compare the performance of miracles. If so, two stages of amendment were to follow, one reflecting a cultic Christ who would arrive in the future, and one reflecting a belief that the Christ had already been on earth.

A line near the end of the work, following the judgment of the false Messiah, tells that "Elijah and Enoch will come down. They will lay down the flesh of the world, and they will receive their spiritual flesh." The meaning of this statement is enigmatic, but some form of distinction is being made between material flesh and spiritual flesh, once again indicating a concept of flesh which is not human.

[page 167] One could liken this 'actuality' to the way Catholic christology has traditionally seen the body of Christ as being present in the Eucharist. That is what the wafer *actually* is (not metaphorically)—just that it is not recognizable as such. But this raises an interesting question as to how Catholics should view such a body. It seems impossible to regard the wafer as becoming an actual part of the human body Christ occupied on earth. And every transfigured host is hardly a new incarnation. The wafer would have to be seen as part of a "spiritual body," and that in fact is how it is often referred to. But is this continuous with a body now possessed by Christ in the spiritual dimension? As far as I know, modern theology (unlike ancient thinking) does not impute a "body" to Christ in Heaven, but rather would define him as pure spirit. Thus the "body" in the Eucharist would seem to be hanging in some kind of no-man's land, to be identified neither with Jesus' past body on earth or with a different body now in Heaven. In contrast, Paul has a definite concept of a "spiritual body" of Christ, with some sort of substance, as we shall see. It is a spiritual reality in itself, and in some contexts spans heaven and earth. If we take our cue from the Catholic Eucharist, which views the wafer as constituting a spiritual reality, we can understand Paul's use of "body" and "flesh" in the same way, as representing something other than an earthly entity. Moreover, such ideas would not require Paul to have believed that Christ ever existed in an incarnated body on earth.

The writer calls the unification of Christ and church into one body a "mystery"—that is, it constitutes a spiritual reality that has hitherto lain outside human knowledge and is beyond normal human comprehension. Thus it is not a metaphor.

[page 178] A possible exception to this in the epistles is found in 1 John 2:6.

But whoever keeps his (God's) word, in him truly has the love of God been perfected. By this we know that we are in him (God): whoever claims to live in him must conduct himself as that one (i.e., Christ) conducted himself [lit., must walk as Christ walked].

But this is too ambiguous and obscure to constitute a secure reference to Christ living a life on earth. Christ "walking" (i.e., conducting himself, it is not a reference to walking on two feet) is a thought that could apply to his behavior in the lower heavens, being faithful to God and his mission. Indeed, the passage

refers to keeping the word *of God*, his commandments (v.3)—specifically, as the writer goes on to say, the command to love one another. This is something that Christ himself would have done (see 1 John 3:16) even in a spiritual setting, obeying the word of God and loving the believer by giving his life. In view of the fact that in the Johannine epistles it is God who is presented as teaching the all-important love commandment, it can be seriously doubted that 2:6 envisions Jesus in a career on earth. He is also referred to as being "pure" and "righteous" (3:3,5), but this is something present; he is these things *now*, just as 1 Peter has said that God *is* holy. No past life on earth is required by these passages.

Chapter 14: Paul and the "Heavenly Man" (pages 179 to 196)

72 **[page 179]** These details are outlined in Mircea Eliade's *A History of Religious Ideas*, vol.2, p.317-21, and can be found on various Internet pages. As is the case with most mythology, details vary between different ancient sources, sometimes significantly. Eliade notes (p.268) that the christological title of the Gospels, the "Son of Man"—which may also echo a more mundane use of the term in the Old Testament, simply meaning man/humanity—is derived from "a comparatively familiar figure in the Hellenistic world, that of the Anthropos or Primordial Man," a myth which is "Indo-Iranian in origin."

In this myth of Gayomart, a 'Primeval Bull' is also slain, though not by Gayomart himself. Both the bull's and Gayomart's blood have efficacious effects upon life and the earth. Thus the latter may have become syncretized with the Persian god Mithra whose later Hellenized myth involved the slaying of a bull which vitalized the earth, leading modern parallel-seekers to mistakenly style the Hellenistic Mithras a "savior" who died and was resurrected.

73 **[page 182]** Another import was the concept of Satan, which turned the heavenly Lucifer (in Job, for example, where he is neither a fallen angel nor an opponent of God) into the champion of evil, drawing on the image of the Zoroastrian Ahriman. Satan was a byproduct of the adoption of Iranian dualism, the concept of the created world being a cosmic scene of good versus evil. Satan as Christianity knows him does not appear in the Old Testament, where he is not identified with the tempting serpent of Genesis' Eden. The evolution of Satan as leader of the forces of evil and ruler of the demons (which are also not to be found in the Old Testament) did not take place until the intertestamental period (after 200 BCE). The Jesus of the Gospels was apparently unaware of the recent limited history of this great adversary he was sent to overcome. It is a mark of how new ideas, when once they take root, are read back into the past.

74 **[Page 184]** As with most other topics, Philo is not consistent in the exposition of his ideas. The "man" of Genesis 1 is in places given different interpretations, such as that he represents the internal God-like soul or Logos within the earthly man. This, however, need not interfere with his general heavenly man concept, since the human soul was derived from and reflects a heavenly entity which is once-removed from God. Whether Philo saw himself as recasting an existing Heavenly Man myth found in his Hellenistic milieu might be difficult to say (and is much debated), but that he was creating something of his own *ex nihilo* is hardly likely. The same observation applies to Paul and his heavenly Christ.

[page 186] from Carrier's article "Osiris and Pagan Resurrection Myths" at: [http://www.frontline-apologetics.com/Carrier on Osiris .html](http://www.frontline-apologetics.com/Carrier%20on%20Osiris.html). When he wrote this article (2002), Carrier held an historicist view of Jesus. He has since adopted a mythicist view.

Chapter 15: "Born of Woman"? (pages 197 to 212)

⁷⁶ [page 199] As noted earlier, Paul often seems to talk as though he were the first to receive the revelation about Jesus the Son from God (as in Gal. 1:16). But while he might have preferred to think of it that way, it is clear that he was not the first and he occasionally acknowledges this. The Christ cult existed before him (he had helped persecute it), and in 2 Corinthians 11:4 he speaks of other "spirits" (referring to revelations from the Holy Spirit) which other "ministers of Christ" (11:23) have received. The "coming of faith" preceded him (though it is never located at the time of Jesus or his acts), as part of a widely occurring movement which imagined that God in the present time had revealed his Son and his redeeming role. Paul, even if he sometimes speaks in a self-centered fashion, is referring collectively to that movement.

Though Paul may acknowledge that others had preceded him in preaching the sacrificial Son, in effect he is placing an exclusive focus upon himself, especially in the Galatians context. By making "freedom from the Law" the central aspect of God's work in the present, he is ignoring or dismissing those who do not preach such a freedom. He never states that others preach this as well, and the evidence (or lack of it) may suggest that he was alone in this. We can assume that the Jerusalem "brothers of the Lord" did not preach the freedom from the Law which Paul advocated, nor did those Judaizers he is condemning in Galatians and elsewhere. And considering that this is a crucial element of Paul's gospel, highly contentious and quite possibly exclusive to himself, it would be absolutely essential that he take into account what Jesus had or had not said on this matter. He does not.

⁷⁷ [page 202] This presents a telling indicator that the writer of the Pastoral epistles knows of no historical Jesus, which strengthens the case suggested in Appendix 1 for regarding 1 Timothy 6:13, with its reference to Pilate, as an interpolation. Failing that, however, Robert Price in his *The Pre-Nicene New Testament* has presented a multi-author view of the Pastorals in a pattern of composition which would allow my observation about Titus to stand and yet retain 6:13 as authentic to 1 Timothy. Price demonstrates that Titus and 2 Timothy were written first by one author, and that 1 Timothy was not only written later by a different author, it incorporated material from the two earlier epistles. This would allow, if 6:13 were authentic, for much of the 'no historical Jesus' spirit of the earlier Pastorals to be carried over into 1 Timothy, even if the later author has absorbed some Gospel data about Pilate. In fact, we find that the 'silences' in 1 Timothy relate to specifics about Gospel details and teachings, not to the existence of Jesus *per se*. It is 2 Timothy and Titus which contain the blatantly exclusionary passages. In any case, I regard the idea of interpolation of the Pilate reference in 6:13 to be, on balance, the more feasible and supportable option, as discussed in Appendix 1.

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[page 208] Translation by Daniel Jon Mahar from "English Reconstruction and Translation of Marcion's Version of 'To the Galatians'," at: <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Ithaca/3827/EGalatians.PDF>.

[page 209] The radical view that none of the Pauline epistles are authentic, but were in fact written in their original forms by Marcion himself—co-opting a supposedly dim and legendary figure of almost a century earlier as a preacher of his own theology—would mean that such originals did not contain the phrases. This view is a complex question. Its leading exponent today is Herman Detering of Germany, with a website on the subject (<http://www.radikalkritik.de>) and a published book, *The Fabricated Paul*. For several reasons, including evidence which often seems dubious and ambiguous, I am not able to embrace this theory, though many of its observations about the epistles themselves are insightful and illuminating, and at the very least give us a picture of a Pauline corpus which has likely been through some degree of later editing. (See also note 179.)

80

[page 210] For up to a century after most of the New Testament documents were written, they were not regarded as 'holy scripture'; no central authority exercised any control over how they were copied and transmitted in various centers. Since this was a period of evolution and strife between competing groups, the default position must be that considerable changes to texts were made during that early period before we have any manuscript attestation. A key reason why we do not have manuscripts earlier than 200 may well be because they underwent so much evolution during the course of the 2nd century that no earlier copies had any reason to be preserved, and much reason to be disposed of. Those earlier versions, perhaps differing in key respects from what was made of them during the process of amendment and canonization, were simply destroyed. Otherwise, there should have been no particular reason why at least a few manuscripts from the 2nd century and even the late 1st century should not have survived.

Chapter 16: A Sacrifice in Heaven (pages 213 to 250)

81

[page 216] There are nuances here which should not be allowed to obscure the essential pattern. Type-antitype relationships between heaven and earth, while predominantly a Greek-Platonic expression during the turn of the era period, had roots and prior expressions in other cultures, including the Jewish one, derived from Semitic and Babylonian thinking. This Jewish brand of 'verticality' was simpler than the later Platonism, reduced we could say to "heaven" and "earth" in which certain things on earth, especially holy places, possessed prototypes in heaven. This sort of concept underwent expansion and sophistication under the influence of Platonism, just as older Jewish traditions about personified Wisdom were enriched by the concept of the Greek Logos. It would be hazardous to claim certain strands in the dualistic cosmology of Hebrews as reflecting only Jewish antecedent thought in this area, since it is impossible to maintain that such Jewish ideas were still present in some pure and insulated form in the 1st century and had not become part of an overall syncretistic cosmology on a scene dominated by Middle Platonism. Thus, there should be no objection to referring to the counterpart higher-lower world thinking in Hebrews as "Platonic," as long as we remain aware of the presence of a Jewish/Semitic root in its background.

[page 219] The context of the author's statement in 6:20 is the declaration that "hope" is being held out to readers on the basis of God's promise to Abraham, which he bound with an oath. This focus, too, resides entirely in scripture, in the words of God to the patriarch. Jesus' historical acts, as well as any words he might have spoken in his own ministry, are ignored as sources of hope and encouragement to bolster the faith and fortitude of the community.

Here we can make an intriguing comparison outside Hebrews, for one is reminded of a very similar passage in the epistle 2 Peter. Briefly put, the scene in 1:16-18, traditionally presumed to be derived from the Transfiguration episode in the Synoptic Gospels (dubiously so, since important elements are missing and the text tells us otherwise), presents the reader with the report of a visionary experience by Peter and others in which the displayed power and glory of Christ is meant to prefigure his Parousia, his arrival at the End-time. For the writer of 2 Peter, this was a vision of what is to come. (And an analysis of the text indeed identifies it as a vision, not an experience of those apostles with an historical Jesus during his ministry.)

He goes on in verse 19 to say something very incongruous: that this visionary experience of Christ "confirms for us the message of the prophets," the biblical prophecies and guarantees about the coming of the Messiah and the kingdom. Yet it can hardly be thought that an incident like this, if part of Christ's life on earth witnessed to by his followers, could be placed in a position of secondary importance to the general promises of scripture, which the writer styles "a lamp shining in a murky place until the day breaks." Scholars admit the incongruity in such a way of putting things, that the experience of Christ's own person and life on earth has not taken over first place to that of scripture in inspiring Christian hopes. The continued existence of a murk awaiting the break of day would hardly be possible; it would surely have been dispelled, at least partially, by the recent life of the Son of God on earth. (This alone reveals 2 Peter's lack of an historical Jesus.) In the same way, Hebrews' arrival of the New Covenant would hardly have been so murkily portrayed or transferred so thoroughly to Heaven, nor would scripture be held up as the sole lamp of the community's knowledge, had the vivid events of the Gospels just taken place. (Compare this to Paul's similar way of speaking about the coming End, as in Romans 8:38; see ch. 5.)

For a thorough examination of this passage in 2 Peter along with the epistle's other indicators that no historical Jesus is known to the author, see my website Supplementary Article No. 7, "Transfigured on the Holy Mountain" at:

83 <http://jesuspuzzle.humanists.net/supp07.htm>.

[page 221] To style these two present-tense verbs as a usage of the "historical present" would be somewhat begging the question, especially considering that neither context is dealing with history but rather with heavenly or spiritual dialogues. And while it is true that in Koine Greek, as we do today, it was not unusual to refer to past writers as speaking in the present (commentaries like my own book consistently do that, such as: "Schweitzer says..."), the case here is quite different. Words in scripture are being presented as spoken by Christ (or the Holy Spirit). It would be difficult to regard a writer like that of Hebrews as envisioning that these are words spoken at some time in the past by an historical figure but styled in the present tense. We do that when referring to words *written*

by a writer; Christ did not write the scriptures, he is being quoted within them with no visible qualification or understanding of an historical setting.

84 **[Page 226]** Other available sayings to be found in the Gospels are Luke 8:21 and parallels, Matthew 25:40, John 20:17. Whether these have been placed in Jesus' mouth or not, they show that for those who subscribed to an historical Jesus, the tendency was to preserve and attribute sayings to him which would serve their purposes. Hebrews, indeed the entire body of early Christian writings, is lacking in that tendency.

Nothing could more clearly illustrate that the voice of the Son speaking in these last days, as presented in 1:2, is not the voice of the Son on earth, but the voice of the Son in scripture. Through such passages as are appealed to here, the Son speaks out of the new interpretation of scripture, not out of the past. He is known and communicates now and today, directly to the minds of those who "hear" him. Harold W. Attridge (*The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p.24) notes that the Old Testament citations at 2:12-13 and 10:5-10 "are the only 'sayings of Jesus' recorded in the text." He further observes that in various arguments throughout the epistle, traditions of Jesus' teaching "play no explicit role in the argument." This exclusive use of Old Testament passages as "words of Christ" he labels a "conceit." It may be "striking," he says, but it "is hardly confined to Hebrews." This is a notably common fallacy encountered within New Testament scholarship. An anomaly in a given document which ought to be perplexing is imagined to be neutralized by pointing to a similar anomaly in other documents, as though a multiplicity of such anomalies somehow makes the basic problem disappear.

85 **[page 226]** This principle of paradigmatic parallelism is sufficient to explain the whole phenomenon of the "likeness" of Christ to humans in the early record. It is an interesting concept that a god must undergo the experiences of the human in order to acquire the capacity to help them. It is as though we would say that a doctor cannot cure a disease unless she has had the same disease herself. Why this is so is never explained, in the same way that the writer later says (9:22) that the shedding of blood is required for the forgiveness of sins, with no explanation why. (To say that God requires it, which is the only 'explanation' available, is to place the responsibility directly on him.) Such necessities were regarded as part of the natural order, and speak to the primitive character of the religious thinking of the age.

86 **[page 229]** Even were Melchizedek lacking a heavenly dimension, we are seeing throughout Hebrews a progression from an earthly prototype to a heavenly antitype, a pattern into which one could fit the heavenly High Priest being in the line of an earthly antecedent. Paul's "first and last Adam" in 1 Corinthians 15, with the heavenly Christ following on the earthly Adam, is in the same vein.

87 **[page 232]** Ellingworth appeals to *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by F. Blass and A. Debrunner (translated into English by Robert W. Funk in 1961), a comprehensive reference grammar which goes beyond standard grammatical rules and demonstrates that the latter enjoy anything but rigid application. In fact, we can see two other examples of "the imperfect in unreal conditions (being) temporally ambiguous" right in the text of

Hebrews itself, both using an almost identical construction with the imperfect *"en"*. More than that, these passages are actually understood to be referring to the *past*, and there is nothing ambiguous about it. The first is 7:11:

Ei men oun teleiosis dia tes Levitikes hierosunes en,

If — therefore perfection through the Levitical priesthood were [i.e., were possible, or had been attainable],

tis eti xreia kata ten taxin Melchisedek

why [was there (the second *"en"* is understood)] still a need, according to the order of Melchizedek,

heteron anistasthai, kai ou kata ten taxin Aaron legesthai?

to speak of another priest arising, and not according to the order of Aaron?

The failure to achieve perfection under the old system of earthly priests is a past condition, even if continuing into the present. (That theoretical continuation into the present, in fact, would provide a justification for using the imperfect tense, in keeping with the general rule.) And since the writer in the second half of the sentence is referring to the word of God in scripture (his quote of Psalm 110:4, which he interprets as God indicating that another priesthood will arise), this too is a past condition. Thus, this passage, though using the imperfect tense *en*, is understood in a past sense and so translated. The same situation exists in 8:7:

Ei gar he prote ekeine en amemptos,

For if that first (covenant) was/had been faultless,

Ouk an deuterias edzeteito topos.

There would have been no occasion for a second one.

While this example can also lean toward the present, the imperfect tense *en* is understood and translated as referring to the past. There is no impediment to doing the same with 8:4.

[page 234] I have provided a literal translation of the second part of the verse, because it needs to be pointed out that, regardless of whether most translations use the present tense "are" in that second part, one cannot derive any indication from it which would identify the time sense of the first part. In fact, that use of "are" translates a present participle—in this case *"onton"*—which places the thought in the *same time frame* as the main verb, whatever that may be. Consequently, it is as grammatically ambiguous as the main verb. My translation "being" conveys that ambiguity, since in conjunction with the main phrase of "had been on earth" the word "being" equally fits the past sense.

[page 234] It is not a case, as Ellingworth puts it, that the idea behind the remark is that "God cannot establish two priestly institutions in competition." Obviously, the two priesthoods *are* compatible if they operate in their respective spheres and in their proper relationship. In fact if, as many scholars interpret it, Christ's death had taken place on earth and was thought of as part of the sacrifice, a sacrifice starting on Calvary and being consummated in Heaven, there should have been no inherent impediment to God having both those "priestly institutions" operating on earth at the same time, and thus Jesus could have been High Priest on earth as well. (Note that Ellingworth's suggestion would have to entail the idea that Christ is High Priest *only* when he gets to

Heaven and that the sacrifice takes place specifically there—something that not all scholars would be happy with, for it would rule out Christ's high priestly sacrifice as entailing the event on an earthly Calvary, as well as make it difficult to see the heavenly event being intended as a metaphor for the latter.) But the author's point is not Ellingworth's suggestion. Rather, it has to do with the separation of the two venues and the type of sacrifices performed in each.

90 **[page 235]** It is worth repeating here that Christ's intercessory duties cannot be in view in verse 4, since they do not involve sacrifice and have been stipulated as now taking place in heaven after Jesus has taken his seat by God's throne. There would be no question of placing them on earth in the present, even theoretically, much less to say that such intercession was prevented by the presence of priests doing their own interceding in the temple. Christ's intercessory duties are also incompatible with the idea of 'once for all.'

91 **[page 236]** One could note that perhaps this contradiction also exists to some extent if the writer is placing verse 4 in the past, for Christ would have been equally unable to be a priest on earth in the past since he is by definition a priest only in Heaven. But in that case the writer is still legitimately making his point about territory, that the earthly and heavenly priests had to have operated in their own respective venues.

92 **[page 236]** We can try an analogy. Bob and Jim, now deceased, were friends and politicians living in neighboring towns, both wanting to be mayors. Since each one lived in his own venue, Bob got elected in one town, Jim got elected a few months later in the other town. An historian writing about the two friends a generation afterwards records this fact, the situation of compatible mayoralities. He decides to highlight that fortunate circumstance by adding a contrafactual alternative: he says, "If Jim had moved to Bob's town he couldn't have become mayor because Bob had already been elected." (Yes, it's trivial and a little silly to state it, just as the Hebrews verse is, but it's still valid.) The contrafactual alternative is placed in the same past time in which the two actually became mayors in their own respective towns, and thus it serves a logical purpose, regardless of triviality. But what happens if the historian places his contrafactual alternative in the present? He says, "If Jim were alive today and moved to that other town, he could not become mayor, since that town has its own mayor." Does this statement have any relevance to the past situation the historian is recording? Does it render any insight into that fortunate situation a generation earlier of the two friends being able to occupy two mayoralities? If that is what he is seeking, then he would put it into the past tense. In the present it is simply a non-sequitur, and there can be no reason why the historian would say it.

93 **[page 240]** Sidney G. Sowers, *The Hermeneutics of Philo and Hebrews*, p. 105, as quoted by Ronald Williamson in *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Williamson further maintains that the relationship between the earthly and heavenly sanctuaries and what goes on in them is

a typological, eschatological, then and now, relationship between the Jewish animal sacrifices and the Sacrifice of Himself once offered by Christ, but there is nothing of Platonism in that (p.566).

Again, however, this simply constitutes the usual tactic of assuming that the "Sacrifice of Himself" took place on earth in recent history, in order to extract a Jewish linearity out of the relationship. But the writer never states this, nor is it clear that he locates the sacrifice, whatever its venue, in the present period.

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[page 241] In addressing this glaring silence on Jesus' own establishment of the Eucharist and its new-covenant words, traditional scholarship is clearly in denial. Jean Hering (*op.cit.*, p.80) and G. W. Buchanan (*ABC: To the Hebrews*, p.152) both make the dubious suggestion that since the author has changed one of the words in the Moses quote in a way which agrees with a word in the Last Supper tradition, this could indicate a knowledge of the latter. Montefiore simply says (p.158) that the author "is not concerned in this epistle with the Christian Eucharist." Attridge (p.258) too observes, once again, that the author is not interested: "(he) does not proceed to find any typological significance in Moses' words in relation to an ongoing Christian cult." Not a single scholar I have encountered is willing to address head-on the implications of the author's failure to draw any comparison with the Last Supper words as 'recorded' in the Gospels and in Paul's Lord's Supper.

95

[page 241] This is borne out grammatically in verse 12: "(Christ entered) not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, once for all into the sanctuary, obtaining an eternal redemption." All translations I am aware of take the aorist participle of "obtaining" as an action simultaneous with the entry into the heavenly tabernacle. There is no implication that the redemption has been achieved at a previous point, such as on Calvary. The entry into the sanctuary is the point at which the New Covenant is established, not the point of death.

For a fuller discussion concerning these issues and the views of several contemporary scholars, as well as other elements of this chapter, I recommend to the reader my three-part website article "The Cosmic Christ of the Epistle to the Hebrews" beginning at: <http://jesuspuzzle.humanists.net/suppl40ne.htm>.

96

[page 241] Not all scholars have been so sensitive. E. F. Scott, writing in 1922 [*The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 116-17], declares that

the divine realities are conceived of in a literal and concrete fashion...they are actual things, corresponding on a higher plane to their earthly copies. There is a heavenly Jerusalem, a heavenly sanctuary. The priesthood which Christ exercises is the counterpart, in no merely figurative sense, of the levitical priesthood.

I fully agree. But the more that scholars like Scott stress this literal actuality in the heavenly side of the equation, the more they are acknowledging the Platonic nature of it all. The more they support the concept of counterpart realities in the spiritual realm to earthly realities, the more they provide support for the mythicist case. Opening the door to literal heavenly cities and sanctuaries, literal priesthoods and blood of sacrifice, also opens the door to literal heavenly crucifixions and the suffering and death of a god, to being "of David's seed" or "of the tribe of Judah" in a spiritual context. The vividness of the heavenly scene in Hebrews thus becomes self-sufficient. We do not need a scene on earth, especially when the writer never gives us one. If Christ can carry his own blood into a heavenly sanctuary and smear it on the altar for the atonement of sin, "in a

literal and concrete fashion," he can also be seen as shedding that blood on a heavenly cross. (The disturbing view through that open door has no doubt led more recent scholars to dismiss such Platonic literalism and close it to any heavenly mythological thinking on the part of the writer.)

97 [page 242] We have seen a similar idea voiced by Plutarch in regard to Osiris:

It is not, therefore, out of keeping that they have a legend that the soul of Osiris is everlasting and imperishable, but that his body Typhon oftentimes [i.e., repeatedly] dismembers and causes to disappear, and that Isis wanders hither and yon in her search for it, and fits it together again. [*Isis and Osiris*, 375]

This must be taken in a mythical, mystery-cult context, as it is hardly likely that the Egyptians envisioned such repetitive actions by Osiris and Isis as continuing to take place on earth in historical time. The Hebrews author, of course, is denying any such repetition, for what is required is that Christ's sacrifice be the perfect one, as opposed to the imperfect sacrifices of the earthly sanctuary, and part of perfection is that it need be done only once.

98 [page 247] R. McL. Wilson (*Hebrews*, p.217) remarks that "our author shows no knowledge of Acts and in any case draws his examples from the Old Testament, not from recent history"; elsewhere (p. 162) he comments that the writer "shows little interest in contemporary or recent history." Since this lack of interest extends to everything and everyone involved in the Gospel story, the strangeness in such observations is exceeded only by the strangeness in scholarship's lack of perplexity at it. Nor has Wilson noted that lack of knowledge of Acts itself should not preclude familiarity with the story of Stephen and his stoning if the scene had any historicity to it.

99 [page 250] Attridge (*op.cit.*, p.391) makes the point that the phrase 'speaking the word of God' was "a common way of referring to Christian proclamation." This is true, although only in general contexts and as a stereotyped thought. Attridge supplies examples from Acts, as in 4:31: "(the apostles) were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness," though nothing from the Gospels. His examples from the epistles (Phil. 1:14, 1 Peter 4:11) essentially beg the question, since his assumption is that Paul and other epistle writers knew of a preaching Jesus and yet spoke of "God's words"; but if they did not, then they were indeed proclaiming the word of God, there being no word of an earthly Jesus to proclaim. Attridge also refers to Didache 4:1 and Barnabas 19:9, but in both documents the phrase is found in the attached "Two Ways" sections, where there is no attribution whatever to Jesus of a list of Gospel-like moral directives, indicating that these collections were not identified with him, but with God. In fact, Barnabas clarifies in 21:1 that these are "ordinances of the Lord" (God) which are written in scripture, removing them from any source in Jesus.

This makes the point in regard to Hebrews 13:7. Just as specific sayings given to Jesus in the Gospels ought to be attributed to him and not to God when they appear in other texts (1 Thessalonians 4:9, for example, is astonishing), if the experience at the 'beginning' as outlined in chapter 2 did refer to the voice and teaching of Jesus, then the reference in chapter 13 to that hearing should have had every reason to refer to it as the words of Jesus, not the word of God.

An apologist like J. P. Holding has sought to explain such anomalies by saying that hearing the voice of Jesus is hearing the voice of God. But to think that so many writers would express themselves so obliquely—and so against human nature—is a solution that does not commend itself as reasonable.

Chapter 17: *The When of Christ's Sacrifice* (pages 251 to 266)

¹⁰⁰ [page 254] Ancient kings such as Antiochus IV could adopt for themselves the cognomen "Epiphanes," meant to imply that they were gods incarnate, but the epistles are not using the term of Jesus in any titular sense. The context always relates to his coming, not to his description. And "*epiphaneia*" is only one of several words used in the same context, making it likely that it is to be equated with those other words, not to serve in these few instances to style Jesus an incarnated kingly figure.

¹⁰¹ [Page264] In the original edition of *The Jesus Puzzle*, I interpreted the language of 2 Timothy 1:9 as indicating that this writer seems to have regarded the actual sacrifice of Christ as *taking place* "before times eternal," the sacrifice being performed before the events themselves which it was designed to redeem. In the context of mythical thinking, this is not as outlandish an idea as it might seem, for reasons that are about to be outlined. But when the other passages are introduced into the analysis, it becomes more likely that this was not the author's meaning, but that he was referring to God's *intentions* "before times eternal."

Chapter 18: *The Birth of a Movement* (pages 267 to 280)

¹⁰² [Page271] These and other aspects of the Shepherd of Hermas are dealt with at length in Part One of my website Supplementary Article No. 12 "Crossing the Threshold of History" at: <http://jesuspuzzle.humanists.net/suppl20ne.htm>.

¹⁰³ [page 272] This does not mean that Revelation must predate Paul, since older ideas can survive in some areas, past advances made on them in others. While some favor the year 68 or 69 as the date of Revelation's composition, before the Jewish War reached its destructive climax, most scholars date the book in the mid-90s. This is probably the better date, if only because the earlier one presumes that John, from his exile on Patmos, was conversant with ongoing events in Palestine and was influenced by them, whereas no Palestinian focus is evident in the book. Other reasons for dating the writing some time after the Jewish War include the use of "Babylon" for Rome, an allegorical epithet which likely took a little time after 70 CE to be applied to the modern-day destroyer of Jerusalem and the Temple; plus the presence of allusions to the legend that Nero was not dead and would return with a conquering army from the east, an idea which, again, is unlikely to have arisen so soon after the emperor's suicide in 68 and been known to John and his circle.

¹⁰⁴ [Page277] In a similar thought, Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:16 says that no one can know the mind of God, but "We, however, possess the mind of Christ." In 2 Corinthians 4:6, he declares that the light of God, the revelation of the glory of God, is "within us...in the face of Jesus Christ." This is knowledge of God by proxy, mystical references to his indwelling Son as the spiritual emanation of God operating in the present, not to the mind and face of a recent man.

¹⁰⁵ [page 278] For an extended treatment of this document, with many quotations from its verses, see my Supplementary Article No. 4, "The Odes of Solomon" at: <http://jesuspuzzle.humanists.net/supp04.htm>.

¹⁰⁶ [page 280] "Ambrosiaster" is the name given to the unknown author of a commentary on the Pauline epistles, written at Rome in the latter 4th century. The work was later attributed to Ambrose.

Chapter 19: The Johannine Community (pages 281 to 284)

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[page 282] This may well be an indication that the author of John did not intend his Gospel—perhaps not even his character Jesus—to be taken as history, but rather as symbolic. The fact that he chose not to include any of the teachings of Jesus contained in the Synoptics also indicates that he did not regard these as the product of an historical man. This may provide a clue which indicates John's knowledge of a similar attitude on the part of his Synoptic sources.

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[page 284] 1 John is generally acknowledged to be a layered document. Several passages relating to the "blood of Jesus" (1:7d) and Christ as "propitiation for our sins" (2:2), together with the oft-quoted 3:16 that Christ "laid down his life for us," disturb the flow of passages which speak of the believer's relationship to God or to his fellow sect member. In my view, this epistle reveals an evolution of the community's beliefs in three stages: Originally, the focus was restricted to God himself and his revelation about eternal life; as such, we can see it as entirely a Jewish sect. Then the concept of the Son, Jesus Christ, was introduced to fill this communicating role; even the reference to "his Son Jesus Christ" in the prologue (1:3c) has the air of an addendum to a statement which has spoken of the source of eternal life entirely in terms of the Father: "We here declare to you the eternal life which was in the Father and was revealed to us" (1:2). In the final stratum, Jesus the Son's role is expanded to include a blood sacrifice and propitiation for sin (1:7, 2:2, 3:16a, etc.), though this is not a sacrifice specified as having taken place on earth; nor is it said to be a crucifixion. Its development was in a different line from that which led to the Gospel, since the latter lacks this sacrificial and atonement dimension (see also Appendix 5 [p.674]).

Whether the dispute between different "spirits" from God regarding the question of Jesus Christ "having come in the flesh" (4:1-4 and 2 John 7) relates to the Son's sacrifice, the issue of docetism, or whether it is a further stratum of evolution involving the concept of human incarnation for the Son, is unclear. Dissidents in chapters 2 and 4, two groups that are different in nature, illustrate the resistance of various community members to separate stages of Johannine evolution. These epistles may be the earliest witness to a Christian rejection of the idea of a Son incarnated to earth; certain opponents of Ignatius would follow.

For a detailed discussion of these and other aspects of the Johannine epistles see my website Supplementary Article No. 2: "A Solution to the First Epistle of John" at: <http://jesuspuzzle.humanists.net/supp02.htm>.

Chapter 21: Ignatius on the Threshold (pages 295 to 304)

¹⁰⁹ [Page297] See Bauer's lexicon: *alethos* def.1: "truly, really, actually." E.g., Matthew 14:33 "Truly you are the Son of God." (There is no "false" or different

Son of God as an alternative. Cf. Mk. 14:70, Jn. 6:14.) And Ruth 3:12 (LXX): "It is true that I am a near kinsman." (A statement of actuality; the alternative is that he is not.)

¹¹⁰ [**Page301**] In Smyrneans 3, we find the following Gospel-like anecdote:

For I know and believe that he was in the flesh even after the Resurrection. And when he came to those with Peter he said to them: "Take, handle me and see that I am not a phantom without a body." And they immediately touched him and believed, being mingled both with his flesh and spirit.

This is similar to the "touch me" scene in Luke 24:38-40, although neither Schoedel (*op.cit.*, p.225) or R. M. Grant (*The Apostolic Fathers*, p.l 15) regards it as derived from Luke itself. One might add that if Ignatius was consciously presenting a passage from a written document (even if he didn't have it before him) he would have said so, for pointing to such a document would have been a compelling impulse as a way of giving his declaration authority and support.

By way of corollary, we can rule out that Ignatius knows of the Gospel of John (which is sometimes claimed). In the Smyrneans 3 context, the Johannine episode of "doubting Thomas" would have cried out for mention even more than the Lukan-type scene; nor could it have been circulating in oral tradition and been known to Ignatius. All of this leads to the likely conclusion, supported by the fact that it is found in no other Gospel, that the author of John simply made up his "doubting Thomas" scene himself.

By the same token, it is quite possible that Ignatius in Smyrneans 3 is voicing his own conviction with an anecdote of his personal invention, or that of some Christian preacher in his community seeking to illustrate a newly developed belief about Jesus. (It is conceivable that Luke derived his scene from this same kind of origin.) The early Christian movement, as we see in Paul, was based on the idea of revelation from the Lord, communicating both commandments and information about himself, whether through scripture or visionary experience. Anything proclaimed in such a setting we could reasonably impute to such an origin if there is no clear declaration or evidence to the contrary.

¹¹¹ [**Page 304**] For a fuller discussion of this passage and of Ignatius in general, see Part Two of my website article "Jesus in the Apostolic Fathers at the Turn of the Second Century" at: <http://jesuspuzzle.humanists.net/suppl2Two.htm>.

¹¹² [**Page304**] Schoedel remarks: "There is as yet no critical reflection in Ignatius on how the divine and the human can be joined in Christ." Indeed, before Ignatius no one ever raises the point. Paul, for all his analytical mind in evidence in connection with so much else concerning his Christ Jesus, is unconcerned with understanding how God could become human and take on two natures, and one must conclude by many of his statements (as in 1 Corinthians 15:44-49) that this is because he had no concept of his Jesus *possessing* two natures. (We also saw in Hebrews a similar lack of attention, as noted by Wilson, given to the relation between the divine Jesus and the human Jesus.) Nor is there anything in Ignatius suggesting that Christian thinkers of his time were as yet grappling with the concept of the divine-human duality in Jesus, nor does he engage his opponents on such an issue. Christians are starting to express that duality, but the idea has not been around long enough to generate critical examination.

Chapter 22: The Nature and Existence of Q (pages 307 to 324)

¹¹³ **[page 308]**the term "community" is not intended to describe a geographical entity, but a series of interconnected congregations of believers. It says nothing about the number of members or the distance between the congregations. In its preaching activities the kingdom movement created for itself a profile within the larger society, meeting a mixed response of acceptance, rejection and hostility, as both the Q document and the Gospels demonstrate.

¹¹⁴ **[page 310]** It has been suggested Q may be the document referred to by Papias in the early 2nd century, as recorded by Eusebius. Papias is reported to have said, "Matthew compiled the sayings in the Aramaic language and everyone translated them as well as he could." Papias had himself not seen this document but was reporting something an "elder" had told to him. While this reference, along with his accompanying mention of a "Mark," has traditionally been interpreted as referring to the Gospels by those names, Papias' actual descriptions would tend to rule this out. The "sayings" collected by "Matthew" could conceivably refer to Q or something resembling it, although scholars regard Q as having been written from the start in Greek and not Aramaic (here meaning Hebrew). Papias will be examined at greater length in chapter 30.

¹¹⁵ **[page 314]**For some of Goodacre's views discussed here, see his articles "Ten Reasons to Question Q" and "Frequently Asked Questions on the Case Against Q" on his website at: <http://www.markgoodacre.org/Q/index.htm>.

Kloppenborg's review is published in *New Testament Studies* 49 (2003), p. 210-236. It is online at: <http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/~kloppen/2003mwqh.pdf>.

¹¹⁶ **[Page 575]**Goodacre has countered to this argument that one is being subjective in assuming that Matthew's arrangement is superior or more worthy than Luke's. He suggests that "Luke has a plausible, sequential narrative," one that is (quoting Luke Johnson) "essentially linear, moving the reader from one event to another instead of inserting great blocks of discourse in the narrative." He praises this aspect of "Luke's literary ability," but such an analysis and judgment is probably as subjective as the assumption that Matthew's layout is superior. We may have to say that on this point a definitive evaluation cannot be made.

¹¹⁷ **[page 321]**See "Fatigue in the Synoptics" in *New Testament Studies* 44 (1998), p.45-58. Also online at: <http://www.markgoodacre.org/Q/fatigue.htm>.

Chapter 23: Excavating the Roots of Q (pages 325 to 354)

¹¹⁸ **[page 328]** William Arnal has made a case for interpreting the Q community throughout its history as an ethnically Jewish one ("The Q Document," in *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered: Rethinking Ancient Groups and Texts*, p. 119-154). This is largely based on certain sayings implying a Jewish perspective with gentiles on the outside. John the Baptist, for example, in the opening Q pericope castigates a Jewish audience for being complacent that they have Abraham as a forefather, warning them that God can "raise up children for Abraham out of these rocks." Reflecting Q's own view, this saying implies that the speaker is also talking from a Jewish perspective. At the same time, however, other verses make the picture less clear. The miracle anecdote of the centurion's servant

praises the faith of the gentile; 11:31 and 13:29 strongly imply an inclusiveness of non-Jews in the future kingdom.

119 [page 329] The Matthean version (5:47) has "*ethnikoi*" instead of "*hamartoloi*" and opinion is divided as to which word appeared in Q. I think it less likely that
120 Luke would choose to intensify the reference than that Matthew softened it.

[page 330] F. Gerald Downing wrote a short but influential article "Cynics and Christians" (*New Testament Studies* 1984, p.584-93). It revived an early 20th century trend of observation about the similarities between the wandering Cynics and the activities of early Christians. In that article he details a selection, from "a mass of material," of "often quite detailed overlaps in the message proclaimed by some Cynics and that proclaimed by some early Christians."

121 [page 332] *Who Wrote the New Testament*, p.40; *A Myth of Innocence*, p.67-69, 73-74.

122 [Page332] Downing (*op.cit.*, p.585): "The second presupposition of this paper is that Dill, Halliday and Dudley are right in their picture of the prevalence and influence of the Cynics in Rome itself and in the eastern empire. Dio of Prusa, for instance, says that one would find people claiming to be Cynics (and mostly getting the message right, if less than elegantly) on every street-corner in a city like Alexandria. In his own Cynic phase he himself toured all over the eastern Mediterranean, as well as traveling north of the Danube, with his cloak, staff and beard..." [*Disc.* 32.9; 13.9-11]

123 [page 332] Kloppenborg-Verbin, "A Dog among Pigeons: The Cynic Hypothesis as a Theological Problem" in *From Quest to Quelle: Festschrift James M. Robinson*, p. 98.

124 [page 333] Crossan addresses a significant contrast between Jesus and his disciples on the one hand, and Cynic itinerants on the other. It is often pointed out that the latter carried a knapsack which contained things that were needed to maintain their homeless lifestyle. "It declared and symbolized their self-sufficiency." The Jesus tradition shows the opposite: according to the mission statement of Q 10:2-16, the wandering kingdom preachers are instructed to "Carry no purse or pack, and travel bare foot.... Stay in that one house, sharing their food and drink."

One often encounters the claim that this is "evidence" that Jesus was not a Cynic, or even that he was consciously *anti*-Cynic. But the natural reason for the distinction is undoubtedly one of circumstance, not intention. As Crossan puts it, "the no-knapsack dress code is symbolically correct for his program, in which itinerants are not self-sufficient but interdependent with the householders" (p. 135). This distinction does not detract from the Cynic-source theory, it simply accounts for a key difference between the circumstances of the two groups, the second of which is not in itself Cynic.

125 [page 338] For the most part, I draw here on an article by Christopher Zeichman (an American student of theology who often takes part in Internet discussion groups) appearing in the *Journal of Higher Criticism* (edited by Robert M. Price) in which he took to task both myself and Price for some of our views on Q as expressed in our respective books, *The Jesus Puzzle* and *The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man*. See "Fear and Loathing in a Lost Gospel: A Response to

Some Radical Uses of the Sayings Gospel Q with a Focus on Its Formative Stratum," *Journal of Higher Criticism* 12, No.2 (2006), p.37-49.

126 [page 344] It is not difficult to envision both sets of sayings, despite all their contrasts, serving a purpose within the same community. There is often a wide gap between theory and practice, between the principles which a group sets for itself and how it actually behaves. The history of Christianity itself is a prime witness to that very human incongruity. There have been centuries of lament, from inside and out, over the contrast between the simple message of Jesus and the conduct of the Church, between loving one's neighbor and persecuting him, between forgiveness and tolerance on the one hand and condemnation and segregation or extirpation on the other.

127 [page 345] Here, of course, I am departing from the usual stratification model. More than one critic has faulted me for not maintaining a conformance with standard Q stratification, such as by Kloppenborg. But the particulars of such stratification are not set in stone. They have been determined by interpretations of the reconstructed text itself, and if interpretations change, particulars of stratification may change as well. The viability of any new presentation must be measured by the integrity of its own case, not by established paradigms regarded as axiomatic.

128 [page 346] Attempted explanations for why this effect is present fail to convince: that John at this point had not yet met Jesus and did not know of his existence or his identification with the 'coming one.' This would require that the Q editor knew this and deliberately maintained strict narrative accuracy; but to think that such a consideration would have been allowed by a Q editor who *did* know of an historical Jesus to override the erroneous impression created by a saying he was formulating himself is too bizarre to countenance. If it had passed through some preceding oral tradition, that impression would never have survived corrective alteration. And to maintain that the saying may actually have been authentic to John and faithfully preserved would be alarmingly naive.

129 [page 349] As noted earlier, one saying in Q is sometimes claimed to be an "allusion" to Jesus' death, Q 14:27: "no one who does not carry his cross and come with me can be a disciple of mine." But this refers not to the cross of Jesus but to that of the prospective follower. The saying seems to be a proverb about enduring hardship and the danger of persecution, even death.

Burton Mack (*The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins*, p. 138-9) regards the idea of accepting one's cross as meaning "to bear up under condemnation," and as having had "a long proverbial history behind it" (within the Cynic tradition). The cross "had become a metaphor for the ultimate test of a philosopher's integrity." Robert Funk (*Honest to Jesus*, p.235) regards Q 14:27, along with the similar Gospel of Thomas #55 which adds "like me" or "as I do" to the carrying of the cross, as possibly a "veiled reference" to Jesus' death, but he allows that both could be taken in a non-literal sense. David Seeley ("Jesus' Death in Q," NTS No. 38 [1992] p.223f) places the saying in the context of contemporary Cynic-Stoic philosophy about the pupil who should be willing to follow his master into any hardship, even death. He also admits that "Jesus' death is not explicitly referred to in 14:27." Earlier Seeley has said that "not one

of the passages in which prophets are mentioned refers to Jesus' death. Such a reference must be assumed." Once again preconception determines the course of interpretation. Rudolf Bultmann (*History of the Synoptic Tradition*, p. 161) regards the saying as referring to no more than "a sense of vocation." He also suggests the idiom may have grown up "among the Zealots, whose followers would have to reckon with the cross."

130

[page 354] The "Son of Man" appears in the Gospel of John, only occasionally in an apocalyptic context (1:51, 5:27), but the term mostly serves as a dramatic reference by Jesus to himself, as one who is to be glorified when he is "lifted up" at the crucifixion (e.g., 8:28, 12:23). There is no sense of any derivation from Q, and the Johannine community is not part of the kingdom preaching movement. We can deduce that John has taken the term from one or more of the Synoptics, since it is not found elsewhere in the Johannine literature; nor can it be found in Christian documents outside the Gospels and Acts, except in Revelation, where it looks to be a direct borrowing from Daniel, not filtered through any Gospel or Q understanding. It is to be noted that Paul, for all his focus on the coming of Christ and the imminent End-time, never says that Jesus was the Son of Man or referred to himself as such; Paul seems unaware of the very figure and term itself, yet another factor creating a divide between the Galilean and Jerusalem Traditions.

Chapter 24: *The Gospel of Thomas* (pages 355 to 364)

131

[page 555] Translations by Thomas O. Lambdin, in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, p.124f.

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[page 356] Helmut Koester, in *Trajectories Through Early Christianity* (p. 126-28), puts forward a good argument for locating the Gospel of Thomas, in its final form, in the Edessan region in the 2nd century because only there do we find the name Thomas associated with the name Judas and the designation Twin ("Judas Didymos Thomas" in the introductory line). The general appearance of such traditions in that region cannot reasonably be dated to the 1st century. Later (*Introduction to the New Testament*, vol.2 p. 152), Koester tried to pull Thomas into the 1st century because of the lack of influence apparent in Thomas from the canonical Gospels. But the canonical Gospels show little "influence" in *all* Christian writings before well into the 2nd century.

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[page 555] The astute reader might suggest that in fact they *were* part of Q1, and the standard stratification model needs to be altered. In versions more or less as they stand in Thomas, there would have been no reason for Q1 to reject them and wait until they had been given a stronger apocalyptic cast to bring them into the fold. In any case, once that door is opened, there is nothing stopping other elements of Q2 from coming in as well, and the entire stratification principle would collapse, including what scholarship can interpret about Q as a whole. I prefer to consider other analyses such as those which follow.

134

[page 361] Crossan makes the point (*op.cit.*, p.254) that there are ways "in which a traditional unit can be redacted in line with the basic theology of a document such as the *Gospel of Thomas* or the *Q Gospel*." One, "the *general direction* or overall context of each gospel changes everything within it. That general context

directs the interpretation of every single unit according to the major thrust of the entire document." In Thomas, a major new thrust was created by assigning everything to Jesus and giving him a context, as bare as it is, within a group of disciples. That redaction makes us hear the sayings as his voice. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke—and of Mark, to the extent that he expresses general community traditions like those in Q—have given us a major thrust on a more massive scale, setting the sayings in Q1 and those in Q2 within the story of a Jesus of Nazareth ministering in Galilee and executed in Jerusalem.

Another of Crossan's ways is by "specific or *internal change* within the very wording of the traditional unit itself." We will shortly see how such changes were made to earlier versions of some Q sayings in order to transform them into sayings of a founder when he was introduced—whether as a symbol of the community or actually regarded as an historical figure.

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[page 363] An appeal here to the theoretical distinction between compositional history and tradition history would be in danger of being overworked. It is not feasible that these Son of Man sayings actually went back to an earlier time, that they were existing in the traditions of the community from the time of Jesus or shortly thereafter, and yet were never added to the literary record, not even to Q2 until later in that phase—and even then inserted without clear identification with an on-the-scene Jesus.

Chapter 25: Introducing Jesus to Q (pages 365 to 378)

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[page 375] One can derive a good indication of this sort of change (introducing first person singular pronouns and possessives when a Jesus was added to Q) from a comparison with the use of certain sayings by Matthew and Luke. For example, Luke's version of Q 13:25-27 is undoubtedly the original:

Once the master of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside and knock on the door saying, "Lord, open up!" And he will answer, "I do not know where you come from." Then you will say, "We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets." But he will say, "I do not know you, get away from me all you evildoers!"

Matthew (7:22-23) has recast this story-parable to render it a saying by Jesus about himself, changing the master of the house to a self-reference:

"Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

We cannot make such a comparison within Q itself, since it does not contain two versions of a single saying, but as Matthew has recast a Q unit which did not internally refer to Jesus into one which did, we can see this as illuminating a similar process which certain other sayings in Q could have previously undergone in the course of its evolution. Most of the changes would have been even simpler, from references by the community to themselves, to references by Jesus to himself. For example, Jesus' saying in Q 14:27 that "Whoever does not take up his own cross and follow me cannot be my disciple," would originally

have expressed a thought by the Q preachers that anyone who is not willing to bear his own cross to join their community cannot be a member.

Incidentally, we cannot use the Gospel of Thomas to indicate an early existence in Q of sayings containing a Jesus self-reference, as for example in #55 about hating one's father and mother and taking up one's cross in order to "become *my* disciple." As soon as a "Jesus said" was added to the sayings in Thomas, it would have become necessary to insert certain pronouns accordingly.

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[page 3 75] There is no narrative structure in evidence in Q (beyond that within the confines of two or three individual anecdotes). This is not to say that Q had no overall organization of any kind. As Kloppenborg notes: "Not only are the sayings grouped into several topically coherent clusters, there is also a measure of unity and coherence among the several clusters as well as logical and thematic development throughout the course of the entire collection" [*op cit*, p.89]. But thematic format is not the same as narrative format. The "sermon blocks" do not present themselves as being in the order in which they were preached. Phrases like "inaugural sermon" (Kloppenborg) and "statement of principles" (Schenk) applied to the first block are scholars' labels, perhaps reflecting a certain amount of 'narrative' disposition on their part. The apocalyptic sayings are more or less grouped toward the end of Q, but this does not mean that Jesus waited until later in his ministry to preach about the coming End-time and the Son of Man. And mere mention of place names does not indicate an intended itinerary.

There may have been a logical sequence for the Q redactor(s), but it was not narrative, to follow the course of a ministry. The only bow toward an historical dimension is in the initial Baptist unit, placed where it is since it acknowledges that John had been the one to inaugurate the kingdom preaching process, an idea further stated in Luke/Q 16:16. In both instances there is no mention of a founder Jesus who had also, in some little way, been involved in the onset of the community's message. Kloppenborg, in a classic example of reading something into a text that is assumed to lie in the background, says of 16:16 that it "bears on Q's understanding of the relation of John to the kingdom and to Jesus," and that it "places John alongside Jesus as an envoy of the kingdom" (p. 114). Such ideas are precisely what is missing in this saying and elsewhere.

Chapter 26: Sectarian Developments in Q (pages 3 79 to 386)

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[page 380] Christianity as an expression of sectarianism is dealt with in many books, such as:

Francis Watson: *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles*, p.38-48

Graham N. Stanton: *A Gospel For a New People: Studies in Matthew*, p.89-107

J. A. Overman: *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism*, passim

Philip E. Esler: *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts*, p. 16-22, 46-70

Robin Scroggs: "The Earliest Christian Communities as Sectarian Communities" in *Christianity, Judaism, and other Graeco-Roman Cults*, II, ed. J. Neusner. (A seminal piece of writing on this subject, 1975.)

Some books quoted by the above scholars on the sociology of sects:

Bryan Wilson: *Religion in Social Perspective* (1982)

Lewis Coser: *The Functions of Social Conflict* (1956)

P. L. Berger and T. Luckmann: *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966)

Chapter 27: Mark and Q: The Origin of the Gospels (pages 387 to 404)

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[page 389] J. D. Crossan argues that imbedded within the recently recovered Gospel of Peter lies an antecedent—he calls it the "Cross Gospel"—which was the first passion narrative written, and on which Mark drew for his own story. The other evangelists are also supposed to have drawn upon it in conjunction with their use of Mark. See his *The Cross That Spoke* and *Who Killed Jesus?*

A majority of scholars in the field, however, regard the Gospel of Peter in its entirety as dependent on the canonicals, though there are good arguments for seeing it as having its own early and later strata. Most of the Gospel is missing; everything before the washing of his hands by Pilate is lost, as is the ending in a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus. One reason to doubt Crossan's theory is that the Gospel of Peter offers an actual depiction of the resurrection, yet all four canonical evangelists chose not to provide one of their own.

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[page 396] Robert Price (*The Pre-Nicene New Testament*, p. 115) suggests that the Matthean community may have been using the Gospel of Mark for a time as "a handbook for missionaries," but then decided to write its own expanded version not only to incorporate Q but to correct some of Mark's problems and deficiencies, and to answer questions that had arisen in regard to Mark's story. This would also help explain Matthew's slavish retention of almost all of Mark.

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[page 399] Material on *The Hymn of the Pearl* has been taken from Bentley Layton's *The Gnostic Scriptures*, p.366f., and *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. W. Schneemelcher, p.433f and 498f. The latter, being the earlier publication, reflects a Redeemed Redeemer interpretation, which has the benefit of providing some meaning and role for the pearl itself, something less clear without it. Schneemelcher sees the text's origin, due to the abundant parallels in Mandaean texts, in "the pre-Manichaean Gnosis of East Syria and Mesopotamia" (p.435).

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[page 400] See C. Torrey, *Harvard Theological Review*, 1943, p.51-62, as noted in Bauer's lexicon.

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[page 400] See, respectively, Price, *The Pre-Nicene New Testament*, pages 521, 96, 547. Price also points out that Acts' "Stephen," which means 'crown,' "is named for winning the crown of martyrdom, thus signaling that he is a fictitious character" (p.557, n. 't'). This type of character is known as a "narrative man" (a phrase by T. Todorov), one who exists only within and to serve the purposes of the narrative; or as Price puts it, "a story function that bears a human name." Since "Jesus" signifies "Savior" (entirely so for Paul, who had no human name in mind), might he too not be a symbolic character in Mark, a "narrative man"?

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[page 400] It has been suggested that certain minor mentions are more than we should expect from a fictional creation, such as the sons of Simon of Cyrene, Alexander and Rufus (Mk. 15:21). If the story and characters are fictional, why insert such fine details? But Mark has given us other details which are clearly contrived for story effect, such as handy and seemingly ever-present coteries of Pharisees, scribes and doctors of the law who, even if not named, are there to serve as foils for Jesus' words and admonitions. Such detail makes an account more colorful and lifelike. In fact, the very presence of "Alexander and Rufus" is suspicious. Since they figure nowhere else, how are we to assume that Mark,

writing half a century later, would have any knowledge of such obscure people, especially as sons of a man who appears only once, in passing? Neither he nor his sons presumably had anything to do with the subsequent Christian movement. Did someone interview Simon at the scene and record the names of his offspring? Why would Mark think his readers would have any need or interest in knowing the names of these two totally obscure sons? The best explanation is that Mark has here introduced a bit of literary color. Moreover, there is not the slightest mention of Simon of Cyrene outside the Gospels; one might think that a man who had actually helped Jesus carry his cross would become famous in Christian tradition. If he is a literary invention by Mark, then so are his sons. (We have no reason to identify one of them with the "Rufus" in Romans 16:13.)

One wonders if perhaps Mark has adopted another device for his allegorical tale: introducing some people by names that correspond to members of his community. Perhaps "Simon" was a man in Mark's congregation well known for helping people (he would not only give you the robe off his back, he'd even put your cross on it), and he had two sons named Alexander and Rufus. The congregation would get a kick out of that, and the point would be even more dramatically brought home. Perhaps Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus, had been a local beggar who was reputed to have been cured of his blindness by one of the community's prophets. Mark might have thought it clever (and it would be) to make his Jesus responsible for that healing, again a link with a piece of reality the congregation would have been familiar with and responded to.

¹⁴⁵ [Page 401] By way of analogy, historians a few hundred years hence would be guilty of a similar misconception were they to date every 20th century document which spoke of the fear of nuclear war as coming from the period of the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. That may have been the high point of such fears, but we know that they extended throughout the Cold War.

¹⁴⁶ [page 403] There need be no necessary equation between Jesus' prophecy of the destruction of the Temple and the warnings about the abomination. In fact, what Mark has done is a device of apocalyptic literature generally. The book of Daniel, written between 167 and 164 BCE, purports to be the work of the 6th century BCE prophet Daniel, who 'predicts' historical events up to 167—predictions which of course had come true—in the hope that the readers would have faith in the author's additional prophecies being made for the immediate future after that date. In the same way, the writer of Mark has included, as part of a prophecy by his Jesus some four decades before the fact, the destruction of the Temple in the Jewish War—a 'prophecy' which came true. Mark is 'hooking' the reader into thinking that the Jesus figure—or the movement he is meant to symbolize—had accurately predicted a future historical event. By this, Mark hopes to convince the reader that his own prophecies about the arrival of the End time, beginning with the threatening abomination of desolation followed by dramatic celestial events and the arrival of the Son of Man (as laid out in 13:24-27), can be trusted to happen.

¹⁴⁷ [page 403] The radical late dating of the Gospels (post-130) is often supported by an appeal to this prophecy as applying to events of the second Jewish War of 132-135. By this reading, Hadrian's establishment of pagan altars on the Temple

mount after 130 becomes the "abomination of desolation" which Mark is referring to, and with the revolt under Bar Kochba taking shape in response, Mark is warning his readers to flee to the hills. In this case, "those in Judea," where the revolt started, would have been meant literally.

However, it is highly unlikely that Mark is writing in Judea for Judeans. If his readership is as far away as Rome, or even only in Syria, there would be no need to urge people in those areas to take to the hills. Since the possibility was also floated at the time of the Bar Kochba revolt that the Temple, destroyed 60 years earlier, could be rebuilt, it is further suggested that this is what Jesus is alluding to when in Mark 14:58 he is accused at his trial of having said: "I will throw down this temple, made with human hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands." This, it is claimed, could have been meant as a prophecy of the Bar Kochba situation, when Jews were holding out the expectation that the Temple would be rebuilt. (This would require that Mark wrote in a narrow window before the failure of the revolt by 135.)

Yet this requires a serious contravention of the words of the statement itself. First, the rebuilding of the Temple after 60 years is hardly "three days later," and Jesus is saying that it is himself who will do the building, and "not with hands." The prophecy clearly bears a spiritual significance, with the three days no doubt referring to his resurrection. It should also be asked why any Christian would have an interest in seeing the Jewish Temple rebuilt, to resume the old sacrifices which Jesus' own sacrificial death had supposedly supplanted. Mark would be very unlikely to purposely associate Jesus' prophetic intentions with the rebuilding of the Temple, especially at a time when Christianity had made a complete break with Judaism and there was bad blood between the two groups.

There are also difficulties of a more general nature associated with such a late date. By 130, apocalyptic expectations among Christians had receded. The Gospel of Luke, for example, downplays any immediacy for the future Parousia of Christ, whereas for Mark the event was almost around the corner. And yet, if Mark was written no earlier than 130, this means that the other two Synoptics, and even John, would have had to follow as redactions of Mark almost immediately, within a handful of years. By the 140s, Marcion was operating in Rome and putting together his canon of authoritative documents in support of his own theology. It featured a shorter version of the Gospel of Luke (probably the postulated Ur-Luke later doctored and expanded by the Roman Church around or just after the middle of the 2nd century). Justin, hardly a few years later, was speaking of, and quoting from, multiple accounts he called "memoirs of the Apostles." The fragment P52 of the Gospel of John, usually dated about 125—although 150 would be a more cautious and reasonable 'mean' date (see note 162)—would indicate that at least an early version could have been in existence in the second quarter of the century.

This would mean that all four Gospels would likely have to be crammed into a window of composition not much longer than a decade. Since it is assumed that they were not all composed in the same center, this would necessitate an immediate and rapid distribution of copies of Mark to most major Christian communities and its equally immediate transformation into other divergent versions. This is something which is hardly suggested by the dearth of witness to

the Gospel story in many centers even well past the mid-point of the century. To get around that, some have suggested that in fact Marcion's version of Luke was the original Gospel, but this is a suggestion which is too problematic, especially given the role of a Q document in the Synoptic picture. It would also require that Mark was written later, and not as the first Gospel; but Mark as a drastically reduced version of Luke or Matthew can scarcely be supported.

¹⁴⁸ [Pa^aS^e 404] Burton Mack allows that Luke and Acts were written about 120 (*Who Wrote the New Testament?* p. 167). For more on the dating of Acts, which more and more scholars are pushing into the 2nd century, see chapter 30.

Chapter 28: The Gospels as Midrash and Symbolism (pages 405 to 438)

¹⁴⁹ [page 413] In his *The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man* and *The Pre-Nicene New Testament*, Robert Price points out many of these anachronisms. In Mark 7: If, it is the disciples who are accused of not washing their hands before eating, not Jesus, "a dead giveaway that the story originated amid the deliberations of early Christians" [*ISSM*, p.260]. Moreover, the Markan aside in verses 3-4 has him attributing to Palestinian Jews practices which properly belonged to Diaspora Jews. Matthew in 21:2 mentions the "Seat of Moses," a chair set aside in the synagogue for the presiding elder, which is a 2nd century feature; and he refers to "the Church" in 18:17, an obvious later situation, as is verse 20: "Where two or three are assembled in my name, I am there in their midst." Use of the term "church" by Jesus in Matthew's famous "Upon this rock" saying to Peter indicates a time when a church existed and it was in the writer's interest to trace its establishment back to Peter. Throughout Luke there is an emphasis on the church as the agency of salvation, not Jesus himself. In John 9:1-41, the man healed of blindness from birth is expelled from the synagogue, something his parents fear too, a situation which existed (especially in Galilee) only much later. Acts, too, is full of anachronisms. The reference in 6:1 and 9:39 to the order of "widows" who are on the church dole is a development of a later time, when Christian husbands had had time to pass away and leave their wives needing community support. References to congregation "elders" and even to "the olden days" (by Peter in 15:7) are authorial slips that place the action well beyond the time of the early apostolic period. (In this chapter I am heavily indebted to Robert Price for his thorough surveys in various books and articles on the midrash content of the Gospels, especially the ministry accounts.)

¹⁵⁰ [Page 415] See John Kloppenborg, *The Formation of Q*, p.250f.

¹⁵¹ [Page 418] Mack (*A Myth of Innocence*, p. 159) quotes a passage from Seneca: "Words should be scattered like seed; no matter how small the seed may be, if it once has found favorable ground, it unfolds its strength and from an insignificant thing spreads to its greatest growth" (*Epistles* 38:2). Clearly, the parables of the kingdom imputed to Jesus have much in common with the wider expression of this period, including within pagan circles, making the link of Q1 to a Cynic precedent not an unlikely one, even if many of the parables that ended up in the Gospels display a Jewish orientation, some perhaps reworked to create one.

¹⁵² [Page 421] Note that for Isaiah this is all to happen on "the day the Lord comes," which is a reference to God, as Isaiah in the 6th century BCE knew nothing of a

Son and Savior. This is a good example of how ideas mutate and undergo different application when taken over by new generations and new groups. If they're lucky, the old references gain fresh life as prophecies of the new.

¹⁵³ **[Page 425]** The Hebrew bible contained virtually nothing about evil demons, and certainly not in connection with sickness, so that healings in scripture were not cast in terms of expelling them from the sufferer. But the forces of darkness loomed ever larger in Hellenistic and Jewish thought during the intertestamental period (after about 200 BCE), as did the concept of Satan as prime leader of these forces. For Christian fixation on Satan as an arch-devil, which regrettably continues to this day, we can thank Persian Zoroastrianism. The chief of devils, under the influence of Persian demonology, evolved out of less evil antecedents in Jewish heavenly mythology.

By the era of Christianity evil spirits had become an obsessive preoccupation for many. Ephesians 6:12, with its grim lament about the fight "against the superhuman forces of evil in the heavens," reveals the tormenting effect which such superstition could have. Mark's healing Jesus had to be cast in such a context, forever saddling Christianity with a Son of God who himself believes in these malignant forces and even converses with them. It is perhaps the most primitive and embarrassing feature of Gospels which on the whole are not marked by an excess of rational thought.

¹⁵⁴ **[page 427]** See, for example, Burton Mack, *A Myth of Innocence*, p.209-11.

[page 427] Apollonius of Tyana was a neo-Pythagorean who lived until around the year 98 CE. He was said to have been sired by the Egyptian god Proteus, to have preached one true God, performed miracles, healed the sick, cast out demons, and raised the dead. Following his own death, it was claimed he had himself raised from the dead, appeared to his followers to discuss immortality with them, and made a bodily ascent into heaven. The satirist Lucian in the mid 2nd century makes reference to him. His 'biography'—in which it is impossible to separate fact from legend—was written around 220 by the Sophist Flavius Philostratus. See Philostratus: *Life of Apollonius*, translated and edited by C. P. Jones and G. W. Bowerstock (1970); and *The Life and Times of Apollonius of Tyana*, by Charles P. Eels (1967).

¹⁵⁶ **[page 428]** For example, see Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament*, vol.1, p.134-5.

¹⁵⁷ **[Page 429]** Achtemeier, "Toward the Isolation of Pre-Markan Miracle Catenae," JBL 89 (1970), p.265-291.

¹⁵⁸ **[page 429]** First set: the Gerasene demoniac's spirit expelled (5:1-20), Jairus' daughter raised (5:21-43), woman with hemorrhage cured (5:25-34). Second set: blind man at Bethsaida cured (8:22-26, this being out of sequence), the spirit in the Syrophoenician woman's daughter expelled (7:24b-30), the deaf-mute cured (7:32-37).

¹⁵⁹ **[page 430]** If miracles served as the mark of legitimacy and power, to ensure that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed a new Moses, it is strange that no appeal was ever made, not even in the Gospels, to any surviving eyewitness of such a thing. Mark should have been quite capable, especially had he written shortly after the Jewish War, of offering the reader an aside, mentioning a so-and-so who even in his day

could have verified the occurrence of one of Jesus' recorded miracles. It was left to Papias to make the outlandish statement, reported by Philip of Side (Fragment 5), that "As for those who were raised from the dead by Christ, (Papias states) that they survived till the time of Hadrian"—which is to say, after 117 CE!

¹⁶⁰ **[page 432]** *Ancient Egypt: The Light of the World*, p.757-8. Apologists are too ready to dismiss this parallel (which is not to say that Matthew was familiar with the Luxor mural) on the basis of minor distinctions between the two portrayals. A full discussion of the Luxor mural (with graphic) can be found in my website series on the Mysteries, Part Four: "A Cult of Parallels: Pagan Myths and the Jesus Story" at: <http://jesuspuzzle.humanists.net/suppl3D.htm>.

¹⁶¹ **[page 437]** See Price's *The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man*, p.154-155. Helms (*Gospel Fictions*, p.98-100) also has an interesting scenario in tracing John's inspiration from Luke, who processed it through a familiarity with the Egyptian myth of Osiris' resurrection. Those who defend some form of authenticity for the Lazarus incident in John thereby discredit any claims for Luke's reliability as an historian, for how could such a dramatic event, even if exaggerated in Christian tradition through the intervening decades, have escaped Luke's notice? And if John could simply make up a whopper like this and present it to his readers, who could have known nothing about such a thing, what does this say about John's approach to 'history'?

Chapter 29: The Suffering Righteous One and a Tale from Scripture (pages 439 to 460)

¹⁶² **[Page 442]** Ironically, while the Gospel of John has the latest attestation and was probably written last, it produced the earliest piece to survive. The famous P52 fragment from John containing a few verses from chapter 18 is the only scrap of manuscript from any New Testament document we possess before the year 200. Despite wishful claims of a date as early as 125, others allow as late as 160. (See Funk, *Honest to Jesus*, p.94.) Justin in the 150s seems not to know the Gospel.

¹⁶³ **[page 448]** For example, John Dominic Crossan in *The Birth of Christianity*, John Shelby Spong in *Liberating the Gospels*.

¹⁶⁴ **[page 453]** While much scholarly study has gone into the Psalms, it is still not clear just when or in what situations they were written, although as a collection they are no doubt the product of a wide range of times and circumstances. Those plumed by the evangelists naturally tended to be those which express some kind of distress and sense of persecution. Without the Psalms, supplemented by Isaiah 53, the passion story could not have been written.

¹⁶⁵ **[page 455]** The so-called "criterion of embarrassment" has been a staple of New Testament scholarship to determine authenticity, but it relies on bringing modern standards to what would have been embarrassing to early Christians, and other reasons are available to explain the inclusion of such elements in the story, such as the desire to convey certain lessons to the community.

Chapter 30: The Remaking of Christian History (pages 461 to 474)

¹⁶⁶ **[page 461]** References in Justin to "memoirs of the Apostles": Apology 1, 66:3, 67:3-4; Dialogue with Trypho, 13 times, e.g., 100:4, 101:3, etc.

- ¹⁶⁷ **[page 461]** Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Bk. III, ch. xi, 8. The Gospels are four in number, he says, because "there are four zones of the world in which we live, and four principal winds...it is fitting that (the Church) should have four pillars."
- ¹⁶⁸ **[page 462]** For example, Helmut Koester's groundbreaking search for Synoptic references in the writings of the early Fathers, *Synoptische Überlieferung bei den apostolischen Vätern* (1957), concluded that virtually all such references come from a pre-Gospel layer of tradition. Koester revisited the subject, with the same conclusions, in his *Ancient Christian Gospels* (1990).
- ¹⁶⁹ **[page 462]** From the time of the Dutch Radical School in the late 19th century, the entire integrity of 1 Clement has been questioned. Continuing radical views have regarded it as a much later forgery (perhaps around 160) designed to promote an authority for the Roman Church over the wider Christian community under the guise of a pastoral letter addressing a conflict in Corinth of a few generations earlier. This view is unconvincing. Such an agenda in the letter is so weakly put forward it is virtually undetectable; the writer urges on the Corinthian troublemakers no submission to an outside body, only to their own leaders. In speaking of Peter and Paul, he makes no particular link of either apostle to the city of Rome, let alone any mention of their martyrdom there—something no mid-2nd century forger anxious to lay importance on Rome would have passed up. (In itself, this speaks to an early date when such legends about the two had not yet developed, and such an ignorance on the martyrdom of Peter and Paul is paralleled in Ignatius' letter to the Romans.) Moreover, a work written as late as 160 would not be so devoid of references to Gospel events and figures. It is also argued that the letter is too long and rambling to fit its ostensible purpose, but that aspect of it is even less compatible with the claim of forgery; the author is simply a voluble writer, and eager to show off his scriptural knowledge.
- ¹⁷⁰ **[page 464]** There are several other indicators in 1 Clement that this writer does not know of an historical Jesus. These include the passage in Chapter 42 which is often claimed to demonstrate the opposite, as well as the existence of apostolic tradition. There, however, the chain of authority is one through spiritual channels (as in the opening of Revelation), with the apostles going out to preach, having gained faith in the resurrection *through scripture* ("faith confirmed by the word of God"). Since Clement then says that the apostles went out "entrusted by God" to preach the kingdom, we can see that he lacks any idea of a Jesus on the scene who appointed those apostles. For a detailed study of these and other aspects of the epistle, I refer the reader to my article "Jesus in the Apostolic Fathers at the turn of the 2nd Century" at: <http://jesuspuzzle.humanists.net/suppl20ne.htm>.
- ⁷¹
¹⁷² **[page 464]** See P.N. Harrison, *Polycarp's Two Epistles to the Philipians*.
- [page 465]** The later ascription of the Epistle of Barnabas to the apostle who accompanied Paul is not considered feasible today. The epistle is usually seen as the product of a learned Jew of Alexandria, since its earliest attestation is by Clement and Origen in that city. But this is a Jew who has disowned his ancestral religion and claimed the sacred writings of the Jewish heritage for Christianity. Others would say that he is in fact a gentile writing to other gentiles who have thoroughly absorbed Judaism and who see themselves as the inheritors of a new covenant which the Jews have forfeited.

[page 466] Following his quotation from Isaiah 53 to illustrate how Jesus had died to forgive sins, Barnabas tells his readers (5:3):

Therefore we ought to give thanks to the Lord that he has made known [i.e., through scripture] the things that are past, that he has enlightened us about the things of the present [literally, that are here now] and given us some understanding of the future.

In other words, Barnabas is stating that we know of Christ's experiences on earth through the scriptures, in passages like Isaiah 53. Near the start of the letter (1:7) he has declared the same principle: "Through the prophets (God) has made known to us things which are past and present and some measure of the future." It would seem that there is no recent history in Barnabas' mind which also tells of Christ's experiences. Knowledge of the past comes through scripture and scripture alone. (Staniforth's translation of 5:3 [*Early Christian Writings*, p.198] that the writings "give us an *insight* into the past" probably pushes this Greek verb *gnoridzo* past its agreeable limit.)

This restriction to scripture as the source of Barnabas' knowledge about Jesus' life explains a curious phenomenon in the epistle. The writer seems to be implying that scripture has foretold the events of Christ's life, and yet the second half of that comparison is never itemized. Though Barnabas regards scripture as "prophecy," we are never pointed to a concrete- equivalent in history which constitutes the fulfillment of the prophecy. The actual experiences of Jesus on earth are theoretical. That is, the writer seems to be deducing their existence from scripture and then labeling scripture as a prophecy of them, but they are given no independent support or illustration through comparison to a recorded account or oral tradition.

Elsewhere, he is at pains to show how ancient Hebrew institutions prefigured counterparts in current Christian belief and practice. This is one of the chief aims of his letter, the purpose of his allegorical interpretation of scripture: to show that the scriptural "past" is fulfilled in his Christian "present." But when he gets to the description of Christ's passion in scripture, the corresponding fulfillment in the experiences of Christ on earth go undetailed, unidentified in terms of specific historical or Gospel content. (This is in contrast to the later Justin, who directly compares what he regards as scriptural prophecy with the corresponding events described in his "memoirs of the Apostles.")

174 [page 466] See Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, p. 18.

175 [page 467] An adequate discussion of this would be lengthy, given the lack of clarity in Papias' description of how he sought out information from "elders" who in turn had derived their knowledge either from apostles of Jesus or from followers of those apostles. The exact meaning of "elder," or whether Papias uses it with a consistent meaning, the number of stages intervening between himself and the "disciples of the Lord," along with much else about this passage, is a matter of debate. So, too, is the identification of the "elder John" he refers to, whether this is the same as the supposed apostle John, or is perhaps the elder who gave Papias his information about "Mark" and "Matthew." (One might say that if he knew the apostle John, he should not only have *heard* about another Gospel, he would surely have been given an actual copy by the author himself.)

Irenaeus' claim that Papias knew the apostle John of the Gospels is almost certainly based on this uncertain reference to someone whom Papias may not be identifying as a follower of Jesus. Whole chains of early Christian inference and claims about the early period of the Christian movement were based on shaky foundations such as these. In addition, some of the remarks assigned to Papias suggest he is writing late in the first half of the 2nd century, which makes the feasible number of stages between himself and the presumed apostles of a Jesus on earth too great to suppose that he could have known any of them.

¹⁷⁶ [Page 468] For example, J. A. Kleist (*Ancient Christian Writers*, p.111) suggests that the complaint about "order" in Papias' "Mark" was a criticism that the Gospel was so short. W. R. Schoedel (*Apostolic Fathers*, vol.5, p. 106) describes past opinions about Mark's deficient "order": that it was "the abrupt beginning, the incomplete ending, the admission of 'trivial' points," and so on. These are not definitions of "order" one would normally arrive at if preconception did not require something that could be applied to canonical Mark.

¹⁷⁷ [page 468] W. Schoedel (*op.cit.* p. 106) points out that the style of the quote of Papias about Mark, in "the rhetorical balance of the lines," is the same as the Prologue which Eusebius quotes earlier. Schoedel observes: "This means that Papias has reworked whatever he received from 'the elder' (John?). It is impossible, then, to distinguish between Papias and his source at this point." Not only is Papias reporting the elder's account from memory, he has recast it in his own words. In sum, how such traditions originated about Mark as the interpreter of Peter in regard to this collection of "sayings and doings," or about Matthew as collector of certain Aramaic sayings, and whether the "elder" Papias refers to had anything to do with the formation of those ideas or whether he filtered ideas that had preceded him, is now impossible to say. The highly uncertain state of the fragments of Papias allows us to continue to maintain that no Christian writer before Justin gives evidence of a knowledge or use of written Gospels.

¹⁷⁸ [page 469] Ironically, although Marcion is probably the most often mentioned in speaking about 2nd century "Gnostics" which the developing orthodox Church declared heretical, he lacked the essential elements usually accorded to Gnosticism, namely the intricate mythology of the heavenly Pleroma of emanations of God, and the idea of the attainment of secret knowledge (*gnosis*) enabling salvation. Strictly speaking, he ought to be denied the appellation at all.

¹⁷⁹ [page 469] Marcion's corpus of Paul included ten epistles (all but the Pastorals). Modern scholars have lately been questioning the older assumption that a corpus of Paul's letters was first put together in the late 1st century—not including the Pastorals which were written in Paul's name in the 2nd century—and are focusing on Marcion as the first recorded evidence of the assembly of such letters into a fixed collection. See H. Gamble, "The Canon of the New Testament" in *The New Testament and Its Modern Interpreters*, p.205f, although Gamble believes that Marcion may be reworking some earlier, unspecified collection which had only gradually come together. See also Jonathan Z. Smith in *Drudgery Divine*, p.110, n.44, who discusses scholarly views on the question and supports the idea of a 2nd century corpus in reaction to Marcion. As early as 1934, Walter Bauer (*op.cit.*, p.221-2) not only regarded the first Pauline corpus as a product of

Marcion, he believed it possible that Marcion himself had collected many of the letters of Paul from various communities in his travels from Sinope to Rome.

More radical theories about the Pauline letters include the idea that the Marcionites may have forged them all, or drastically recast more primitive documents going back to Paul, and that it is these Marcionite constructions, with later editing by the Roman Church, which Christianity has inherited. The primary difficulty in considering Marcionite authorship of either the Pauline epistles or the 'Lukan' Gospel he used is that the former lack any clear presence of an historical Jesus—even a docetic one, which Marcion promoted—as well as of a Pauline message about a Christ who would fit Marcionite views of him; and the latter lacks a clear presentation of the sort of high God which Marcion claimed Jesus actually preached. As observed in regard to Q1, it is one thing to adopt a source and reinterpret it to support one's views; it is another to write something from scratch which fails to present one's own agenda in a clear and forceful way. While Marcion's actual texts do not survive, his version of Luke, and to a certain extent his versions of the Paulines, can in some measure be reconstructed from attacks upon them, notably by Tertullian. (See also note 79.)

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[page 471] One of the most effective arguments for a post-Marcion composition of Acts is put forward by Knox (*op.cit.*, p.119-123). Marcion chose an early form of the Gospel of Luke as his 'canonical' Gospel. Would he have done so if it were already attached to the Acts of the Apostles, a document which portrayed Paul in a way that directly contradicted Marcion's own view of Paul? Marcion claimed that Paul was independent of Jesus' original disciples and was thus free of the "Jewish corruption" (in Marcion's eyes) which those apostles had brought to Jesus' teaching. Yet an Acts of the Apostles integrated with the Gospel of Luke would have discredited that very claim, making it unlikely that Marcion would have chosen to use Luke at all.

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[page 472] See C. F. Moule, "The Christology of Acts" in *Studies in Luke-Acts*, p. 171. See also "Re-Reading Talbert's Luke" in *Cadbury, Knox and Talbert: American Contributions to the Study of Acts*, p.221.

182

[page 473] Paul's occasional reference to such things, as in 2 Corinthians 12:12,

The marks of a true apostle were there, in the work I did among you, which called for such constant fortitude, and was attended by signs, marvels, and miracles,

is little more than a throwaway claim to the same stock-in-trade activity as other traveling apostles and rivals whom Paul speaks of, and we need not wonder that he does not point up his own talents in contrast to a lack of them in others. Paul never itemizes a single one, and we can be sure it did not constitute the healing of paralytics and bringing the dead back to life, as in Acts. Rather, it is no doubt the 'interpretation' of ordinary events which the community sees, or is persuaded to see, as something miraculous or a sign of God's presence and approval.

Nor is there any reference by way of comparison to any of Jesus' miracles, which seem to be unknown on any scale to all 1st century epistle writers. This in itself is exceedingly strange, when one considers that Paul is supposedly trying to convince potential converts that a crucified man back in Judea whom they had never met and probably never heard of was raised from the dead and was the Son

of God. An appeal to his miracles (which would have been portrayed as far mightier than the undetailed "signs, marvels and miracles" which Paul and others were claiming to have performed) would have been invaluable and compelling evidence for believing the things that Paul was saying about him.

183

[page 473] One of the traditional puzzles in Acts, which seemed to point to some source document used by Luke, was the recurrence in certain passages (16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16) of a narrative style which employed the first person plural, the so-called "we" passages. "We set sail from Philippi after the Passover season..." "When we had parted from there and set sail, we made a straight run and sailed to Cos..." Were these from a diary, perhaps by one of Paul's companions? If so, how did it survive the shipwreck recounted in the later chapters? Was Luke trying to heighten the sense of authenticity by putting things in the first person? If so, why so spottily?

The puzzle was solved when Vernon Robbins, following earlier hints by scholars such as H. J. Cadbury, made a simple observation (see *Perspectives in Luke-Acts*, p.215-229). All such passages in Acts begin with and mostly encompass sea voyages. This led Robbins to a survey of the depiction of sea voyages in ancient literature where he found that

One of the features of (sea voyage narratives in Greek and Roman literature) is the presence of first personal *plural* narration. Undoubtedly the impetus for this is sociological: on a sea voyage a person has accepted a setting with other people, and cooperation among all the members is essential for a successful voyage. Therefore, at the point where the voyage begins, the narration moves to first person plural.

Luke is employing a common stylistic device of Hellenistic literature. (If, as opponents argue, the device is not found in every single literary example of the ancient world, this hardly disproves the likelihood that Robbins' principle is what is operative in Acts.)

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[page 473] Erwin R. Goodenough opened his article "The Perspective of Acts" (*Studies in Luke-Acts*, p.51) with this statement: "Many years ago Kirsopp Lake said to a class that if Acts is not a basically sound historical document we know nothing of the origins of Christianity." Modern study of Acts has all but reached that point. It has all but reached a similar point in the study of the Gospels, and Lake's remark will have to be expanded.

185

[page 474] One source we *are* able to identify does not generate confidence in Acts' historical reliability. Paul's famous speech to the Greeks at the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 18:22-31) is closely modeled on a Hellenistic/Stoic type of speech about the true knowledge of God, to which Luke has tacked on a relevant Christian ending. (See Martin Dibelius as quoted by Philipp Vielhauer, "On the 'Paulinism' of Acts," in *Studies in Luke-Acts*, p.34.)

Chapter 31: Jesus in the Christian Apologists (pages 475 to 502)

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[page 477] Scholars have made the claim that 2nd century Christian theology was marked by the adoption of the Logos concept and its application to Jesus. This conclusion, of course, has been determined by the apologetic works we are examining. But such an equation is actually missing in all but Justin. The rest

demonstrate a religion based on the Logos/Son, but without any application to an historical Jesus. Scholars have read such a Jesus into the apologists to much the same degree that they have read him into the epistles. Both are regarded as constituting an "interpretation" of the historical figure, when in fact no such interpretative process is in evidence.

It is also alleged that 2nd century Christians adapted the Logos concept for Jesus because it was a popular theme with pagans. But this implies that they saw it as an advantageous thing, leading us to expect that they should have taken the opportunity to present their founder *in those terms* and thus make him palatable. But, with the exception of Justin, they do not point to Jesus as the embodiment of the Logos. They simply *have a Logos* as the pivot of their faith, which is why we can style them as reflecting a 'Logos religion.'

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[page 478] The nature of apologetic argument in attempting to counter the many perplexing features in the apologists can be illustrated by one used in regard to this particular case. The sentence actually reads:

Not as the poets and writers of myths talk of the sons of gods begotten from intercourse [i.e., with women], but as truth expounds, the Word, that always exists within the heart of God.

The average reader, including Autolycus, would no doubt see the birth of Jesus from Mary as being an obvious example of precisely that, a son begotten from intercourse with women. The counter argument has been made, however, that, strictly speaking, Jesus was not regarded as begotten through intercourse, and therefore he did not fall into Theophilus' category. But it is far too much to expect that a pagan reader would be aware of and expected to take into account such a subtle and fleeting distinction, especially since Theophilus has provided nothing about an incarnation by a virgin birth to an earthly woman in his dissertation; and a perceptive Christian who might conceivably have picked up on such a hair-splitting subtlety is not the writer's target.

Moreover, if Theophilus had this in mind, he would have been led, if not forced, to go on and outline the actual begetting of the Word *in those terms*. Instead, he defines the begetting as an emanation within God himself, making no reference to any distinctive birth from a woman that was *not* by intercourse. Clearly, the distinction he is making is between a spiritual Son begotten in Heaven (the emanation of the Logos) and a human son being born on earth. In essence, the statement amounts to an *exclusion* of any thought of a Son born on earth, through intercourse or otherwise. It is observations like this which make the silences in most of the apologists, like so many in the New Testament epistles, not simply silences but statements which must exclude any thought of an historical Jesus in the writer's mind. Otherwise, they would have to be seen as outright lies and deceptions.

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[page 479] There is a curious feature in the passage just quoted. Twice is a 'clarification' present in the text, presumed to be by Theophilus himself. But while once might be simply an oddity by the writer, twice raises suspicion. In fact, they both reflect a common 'agenda': both narrow a general terminology in the direction of specifics having an ecclesiastical interest which would not otherwise be there. "Assemblies" is neutral, referring simply to a gathering or an

organization of like-minded people. The insertion narrows this—"we mean holy churches"—giving it a more orthodox Christian sense. (As noted, reference to "churches" in the ecclesiastical sense is something that is notably missing in the apologists generally, including Justin.) Then, "doctrines of error" which in the Greek is "*didaskaliai tes planes*" is also relatively neutral, with the first word meaning simply "teachings," making the phrase applicable to any non-Christian religious philosophy (although the use of the term "doctrines" in translation is a somewhat biased understanding, leaning to the sense of 'dogma'). But adding the second insertion—"I mean heresies"—again creates a narrowing effect; the word "heresies" gives the reference the sense of those conflicts which beset the developing orthodox and church-based Christianity of the mid to late 2nd century.

Theophilus might have needed to clarify himself in one instance, but in two, one right after the other? The phrases have the look of interpolations, perhaps beginning as marginal glosses, serving to align the writer with ecclesiastical circles. Nor can we compare the content of *To Autolycus* with other works by Theophilus. The first references to him come from Eusebius and after him Jerome. Other works which they attribute to him are nowhere quoted, and we can have no certainty even that *To Autolycus* has been properly attributed within the traditions they report. Can we even equate the author with certainty to the bishop of Antioch mentioned by Eusebius, even though *he* has? (See also note 189.)

[page 480] Some of the 2nd century apologetic works are beset by uncertainties as to dating, dedication and even authorship, not to mention the reliability of content. In regard to minor apologists outside Justin and Irenaeus, it becomes a shaky proposition to argue anything about them and what we might read into them on the basis of later traditions. The entire Christian record is riddled with recognized misattributions, both of whole documents and stated attributions by other writers which are known to be erroneous, sometimes downright fanciful, often being added by later editors. Melito of Sardis is one example of an early writer (c.175) to whom later writers such as Eusebius have mistakenly attributed all sorts of things. (When later generations were faced with uncertainty, this is all the more reason to think they resolved the uncertainty by deciding in favor of the way they would have liked things to be.) Thus, when we encounter a text whose content is at odds with what tradition would allegedly require of it, we have every right to question elements like dating and authorship rather than read into it things which are clearly missing. (See also Appendix 11.)

As an example of traditions which are anything but secure, we can consider those concerning Marcion held by Christian writers a mere generation or two after his time. Assuming that Marcion came to Rome (which not all modern scholars accept as certain), when did he arrive there? In *Against Heresies*, III, 4.3, Irenaeus, writing near the end of the century, says that Marcion followed Cerdo to Rome and "flourished under Anicetus," who was bishop of Rome for about a decade during the period from 155 and 170 (scholarly dates for Anicetus vary). Yet Tertullian (*Prescription Against Heretics*, 30), writing not much later than Irenaeus, places Marcion in Rome at the time of bishop Eleutherus (175-189 which seems impossibly late, although the text suggests he may instead have been confused about papal traditions). Justin, himself in Rome c.150-165, wrote a treatise against Marcion (now lost) from which Eusebius quotes; this would

apparently place Marcion's activity earlier than either Irenaeus or Tertullian have it, since by Justin's time Marcion is described as an established force to be reckoned with. R. J. Hoffman (*Marcion*, p.34) is also suspicious of Irenaeus' reasons for dating Marcion, suggesting that by placing him in Rome at the time of Anicetus' meeting with Polycarp, Irenaeus could give support to the tradition (which itself has the air of the apocryphal about it) that Polycarp on meeting Marcion called him "the first born of Satan." All this in regard to a major figure on the 2nd century scene. Speaking of major figures, Irenaeus made his own calculations based on material in the Gospels and concluded that Jesus lived close to the age of 50 and died in the time of Claudius! (Against Heresies II, 22.)

These are thorny aspects of an uncertain period, but they illustrate how inaccurate and unreliable the testimonies by early Christian writers could be, and this includes the possibility that traditions were intentionally doctored or fabricated to serve certain interests; indeed, Eusebius has been widely accused of doing that very thing, as we shall see in a later chapter.

190 [page 481] Some claim that silence is not the same as denial, but in passages like this the statement itself logically implies denial since it pointedly excludes the thing being silent on. The epistles, too, are full of such exclusionary silences.

191 [page 483] See H. G. Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, p.66.

192 [page 485] This the ANF translator claims in a footnote is "the language of an affectionate pupil," which is wishful thinking and an application of tradition, as there is no necessary association of *thaumasiotatos* (admirable) with a teacher-pupil relationship.

193 [page 491] Note the translation of the phrase in the first sentence, "proclaimed His Son, the Christ [sent] by Him." The ANF has placed the "sent" in brackets since it is not in the text. The Greek reads: "*kai ton par' autou Christon huion autou*": literally, "and the Christ from him, his Son." Rather than read into it a 'sending' of Christ by God to earth, this is more reasonably a reference to the 'emanative' aspect of the Son. In an Internet translation by Paul Vincent Spade {<http://pvspade.com/Logic/docs/justin.pdf>}, this meaning is rendered clearly:

194 "and proclaiming the Christ issuing from him, his son."

[page 496] Note how Felix has phrased the accusation by Caecilius: "*Some say that the objects of their worship include a man who...*" It does not sound as if Felix is portraying this as a universal belief among Christians or something all pagans are widely aware of.

Chapter 32: *Jesus Among Pagan and Jew* (pages 503 to 532)

195 [page 506] Eddy and Boyd offer a questionable reason for being "not entirely convinced of this" (*op.cit.*, p.178). Lucian uses a Greek word for crucifixion which is not the same as that used in the Gospels and other early Christian documents. "This deviation from Christian tradition may indicate that Lucian is relying on an independent tradition." This is reminiscent of a type of argument defending "independent tradition" between Gospel writers. But neither one makes allowance for simple authorial preference, writing habits, environment, etc., which offer far more likely explanations for such differences in vocabulary. That Lucian was a party to some old linguistic tradition that managed to preserve

itself in pagan circles for over a century amid surrounding Christian usage of other terminology is not too feasible. If it differed from the Christian term, it may simply be a matter of distinctive pagan vocabulary for crucifixion itself.

¹⁹⁶ **[Page 510]** For a fuller discussion of Philo and the Alexandrian scene, see my Supplementary Article No. 5, "Tracing the Christian Lineage in Alexandria" at: <http://jesuspuzzle.humanists.net/supp05.htm>.

¹⁹⁷ **[page 513]** A good example of the pitfalls leading to misinterpretation of earlier Jewish comments is a reference in the Talmud to Balaam as having died at "33 or 34 years of age," which was the traditional age of Jesus at his death. This is then used as support for the Mishnah reference to Balaam being Jesus. Yet the later comment has been preceded by a quote from Psalm 55:23, "Men of blood and deceit shall not live out half their days." As Zindler points out, if Balaam was regarded as a deceiver (according to a body of literature about him which seems to have existed outside the kinder biblical references to him), his age at death would be determined by the Psalm as "less than half" the normal lifespan of 70 years, giving us "33 or 34." Thus, any parallel with Jesus' reputed lifespan is simply coincidence.

¹⁹⁸ **[page 518]** This situation is complicated by the fact that in the later medieval period, Christian censors forced Jewish scribes to eliminate such (presumed) references to Jesus from their Talmudic books. At this point, some manuscripts show the substitution of code words, or the elimination of such passages entirely, either by deletion when producing fresh copies, or by erasure or mutilation to existing ones. Many Talmudic books used in Jewish communities in Europe were publicly burned by the Christian authorities.

¹⁹⁹ **[page 520]** This translation, along with most translations of the passages under consideration here, are taken from Frank Zindler's *The Jesus The Jews Never Knew*. My own close analysis of the Jewish rabbinical literature would not have been possible without his masterful study.

²⁰⁰ **[Page 520]** Here some may be pleased to find specific evidence for the modern popular tradition that all the apostles were martyred for believing in Jesus.

²⁰¹ **[page 523]** More recent scholarship on the rabbinic literature has generally been pessimistic. Van Voorst (p. 120-1) acknowledges that

the third-century rabbis seem to have had no traditions about Jesus that originated in the first century...The more *specific* information given by the rabbis that diverges from the New Testament shows no sign of being from the first century...The better explanation of all the rabbinic information on Jesus is that it originated in the second and third centuries.

And yet, as we have seen, even that is dubious. John P. Meier (*A Marginal Jew*, p.94-5) is even less enthusiastic, noting that "scholars of rabbinic literature do not agree among themselves on whether even a single text from the Mishna, Tosefta, or Talmud really refers to Jesus of Nazareth." He calls attention to Johann Maier's conclusion, "argued in minute detail," that "even the original text of the two Talmuds never mentioned Jesus of Nazareth; all such references to Jesus are later interpolations inserted in the Middle Ages." Meier is not prepared to go quite that far where the Bavli is concerned, but he is in agreement with

other scholars (Lauterbach, Sandmel) who judge that nothing in the literature can be regarded as originating in the time of Jesus or even in the first half century of the Christian era (not a single rabbi from that period is recorded). They also judge that rabbis of the 2nd century (assuming that such early authorities can be trusted as having been accurately preserved and properly understood by later periods, which is highly doubtful) would only have been reacting to the Christ proclaimed by Christianity, not the historical Jesus.

Meier also notes the "common opinion today" that the Ben Stada tradition originally had nothing to do with Jesus of Nazareth (p. 106, n.44). Even Eddy and Boyd agree (*op.cit.*, p. 171) that arguments for identifying Jesus with Ben Stada or Ben Pandera are dubious, that "there is simply no solid evidence to support these speculations." But they think to salvage this opinion: "The only truly significant point about this literature is that, though it sometimes credits Jesus's power to sorcery, magic, or the devil himself, it never denies that Jesus performed miracles—let alone that Jesus existed." Yet to expect such a thing of the compilers of the Babylonian Talmud three, four and five centuries after the 'fact' would be to place an unrealistic burden on the rabbis, along with the unwarranted responsibility for 'proving' that Jesus existed through their silence on the matter.

[page 525] This alleged spin by Jews as a means of discrediting Christian claims of the resurrection surfaces nowhere in Jewish writings, including the Talmuds. (Nor in the *Toledoth Yeshu*, to be looked at shortly.) Its basis appears in the Gospel of Matthew (and *only* in Matthew), a story involving guards at the tomb who were struck dumb at the resurrection and afterwards bribed to say that they had fallen asleep while the disciples stole the body. Justin is not the only Christian who may have picked up on Matthew's concoction and accepted it as fact. Today's critical scholars have rejected the guards episode as an apologetic invention by Matthew, not the least for its absurdity in thinking that Roman guards would agree to such a deception, or that a bribe would compensate for their inevitable execution for dereliction of duty in sleeping on the job. Still, many regard its final line as reflecting a reality of Jewish preaching in the time of Matthew. The guards, they say, may be his invention, but that Jews were going about using the line 'his disciples stole the body' as a counter to the resurrection constitutes the one factual statement in the whole episode; Matthew has invented the guards story as a way of discrediting such an existing Jewish 'spin.'

However, even the final line cannot be rescued. If it were so, the other evangelists (and later apologists) would more than likely also have known of it and be led to address such a Jewish accusation in their own accounts. (Matthew's words declare that the Jewish counter has been circulating for some time, which might even have pulled Paul into a need to address it.) Since it would have been an effective spin, we would also expect it to show up in Jewish apologetic writings, but it does not. Moreover, Matthew's final line is not restricted to the simple accusation that the disciples had stolen the body, but to the entire "story" about the guards which Matthew has just recounted, and if that is rejected as fiction, it becomes difficult to preserve one underlying element of it as factual.

It was suggested earlier that Matthew introduced the guards because he felt that he needed them *within his own storyline*, since it might occur to his readers

(and perhaps did so to Mark's) that it would be an 'out' for the Jews to claim that the disciples had stolen the body. His claim in the final line was simply an extension of a fictional element in a tale that was essentially symbolic.

While more will be said below on the Matthean scene, I refer the reader to a lengthy analysis of it in my "Response to Michael" as part of my website Reader Feedback file No. 28, at: <http://jesuspuzzle.humanists.net/rfset28.htm#Michael>.

[page 526] The two appear one after the other in the tractate *Hullin* (2:22-24). This text is devoted to legal questions pertaining to the slaughter of animals, and neither 'ben Pandera' passage has anything to do with that subject; the seams are evident. The spelling of Pandera is different between the two pericopes, with variant spellings in different manuscripts, suggesting that each had circulated on its own during an evolution of different forms of the name. It is also possible that the two variants are derived from different sources and different figures.

[page 527] Meier attempts to add to the 'evidence' of such a Jewish polemic by appealing to Tertullian's *De Spectaculis* (30.6). He calls this "the next datable reference to the illegitimacy tradition." But this is even less clear than Celsus; and it suffers from a fatal flaw which should actually rule it out.

In a tirade against Jews whom he sees as destined for Hell, Tertullian throws in their faces an array of words and deeds which the Gospels impute to the Jews against Jesus. The first is "this is that carpenter's or hireling's [prostitute's] son." But such an accusation does not in itself spell illegitimacy, and there is certainly no reference to a birth by adultery with a soldier. With a prostitute for a mother, an out of wedlock birth might be suggested, but this is in fact overridden by Tertullian's implication that the Jews scoffed at Jesus' birth *from a carpenter*. The inherent shame in this is that he was the son of a low-born father and common laborer. But this is not in itself illegitimacy.

Moreover, if this was the best Tertullian could come up with in the way of a Jewish insult directed at Jesus' birth, it shows that he was unaware of any piece of Jewish slander—a much more shameful one he would not likely have passed up—that Jesus was a bastard, the product of a passing and adulterous encounter with a soldier. Nowhere in Tertullian, or indeed in Christian apologetic literature before Origen's rebuttal to Celsus, does there appear any allegation that Jesus was the son of a soldier, let alone "son of Pandera." (Justin, as noted, deals with no such accusation.) Thus, Tertullian (and Meier by appealing to him) has actually presented additional evidence that no such polemical insult was circulating among the Jews of that time, and thus we ought to discount the so-called evidence in Celsus via Origen.

As a matter of fact, Meier goes so far as to pose the same doubt. He says (note 84): "Actually, it is not agreed by all scholars that Celsus is telling the truth here; the possibility remains that he fabricated the story as a reaction to the Infancy Narratives and then placed the story in the mouth of a Jew." But Meier dissociates himself from this view by stating that Tertullian—in the passage just dealt with above—"argues for a Jewish source of the idea in Celsus." He has clearly overlooked the inherent flaw in reading this into Tertullian.

In the same passage in his *De Spectaculis*, Tertullian alludes to an accusation by Jews that the disciples "secretly stole away" Jesus' body, but this too, as with Justin, he may well have derived from Matthew and simply accepted as true.

205 **[page 530]** Translation by Robert M. Price, in *The Pre-Nicene New Testament*, p. 255-6. Price points out several subtle ways in which the details of this passage are a 'twist' put on certain features of the Gospel story.

206 **[page 530]** Van Voorst (p. 132) assumes that the story of the guards in Matthew is historical, since "Matthew would be unlikely to report, much less invent, such a vivid, powerful anti-Christian story if it were not in circulation." (He does not explain why all three other evangelists have overlooked or passed up this "vivid, powerful anti-Christian story" in circulation.) But then he is faced with the fact that "rabbinic literature evidently failed to preserve even one earlier Jewish polemic against Jesus," which would have to include the counter to the missing body which Matthew has supposedly recorded, that the disciples stole it. How does Van Voorst resolve this? "The least we can safely deduce from this is that the Tannaitic rabbis seem to have made no attempt to be comprehensive in preserving and reporting earlier anti-Christian polemic. When they did, they were selective—even sparing—in its use." Since in Van Voorst's view Matthew is not to be doubted, then the rabbis apparently decided to forget this prime piece of polemic, or store it away unused. And since he admits that no early Jewish polemic at all was preserved and used, his "selective"—let alone his "sparing"—is an exaggeration.

207 **[page 532]** As for the Gospel of Mark at Qumran, or the related attempt to redate the Magdalen Papyrus fragments of Matthew, both of which were initially seized on to support an early existence of those Gospels and thus of an eyewitness to Jesus, see Meier's notes 37 and 38 to his page 94, and my Reader Feedback response at: <http://jesuspuzzle.humanists.net/rfset5.htm#Glenn>. The views of Carston Thiede and Jose O'Callaghan in regard to the above have long been discredited by mainstream scholarship.

Chapter 33: *Flavius Josephus* (pages 533 to 586)

208 **[page 534]** For example, Charles Guignebert, *Jesus*, p. 18: "It seems probable that Josephus did not name Jesus anywhere; that the Christians—and perhaps the Jews also, for a different reason—were very early surprised and pained by this silence, and did their best to rectify it by various glosses, at various times and in various places, of the different manuscripts of the Jewish chronicler." Maurice Goguel (who is, ironically, frequently cited as one of those scholars who have thoroughly addressed Jesus mythicism and proven it untenable—despite the fact that his effort dates from the 1920s) allows that both passages on Jesus in Josephus can be "suspected of interpolation" (*Jesus the Nazarene: Myth or History?*, p.35). I say 'ironically' because so much apologetic defense of Jesus' existence relies on the conviction that Josephus said *something* about Jesus, and yet one of the major alleged re filters of mythicism commonly appealed to does himself reject the likelihood that Josephus said anything. See my three-part article "Alleged Scholarly Refutations of Jesus Mythicism" for a thorough rebuttal to a century of reputed refutations of Jesus mythicism, including that of Maurice Goguel, at: <http://jesuspuzzle.humanists.net/CritiquesRefutl.htm>.

[page 542] Albert A. Bell, Jr. ("Josephus and Pseudo-Hegesippus," p.351) has this interesting comment: "If pseudo-Hegesippus was not merely translating

Josephus, what was he doing? He was writing history in the only way ancient historians knew how, by adapting an earlier work. [One would have to say that there was the notable exception, Thucydides certainly being one.] Adaptation was the lifeblood of historiography in antiquity. Seneca says that the writer who comes last to a subject has merely to select and rearrange from his predecessors' material in order to compose a new work." A corollary to this procedure would be the permissible addition of one's own material to fill in gaps, or a reworking to 'correct' one's sources.

210

[page 544] This translation of the Latin Pseudo-Hegesippus is a rough one from Dr. Wade Blocker, who "has no time to turn it into a real translation but has himself allowed it to appear on line so other people may use it." (Quote and translation is from http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/hegesippus_00_eintro.htm, in an online article by Roger Pearse). The name itself has nothing to do with the 2nd century Hegesippus, a Christian historian whose works are lost except for fragments in Eusebius, but is regarded as a corruption of the name "Josephus." From internal evidence the writing has been dated to the late 4th century.

211

[page 550] CBQ 61 (1999), p.305-322. Online: (The URL is long and complex. Search: "Ken Olson, Eusebius and the Testimonium Flavianum".)

212

[page 552] Eddy and Boyd (*op.cit.*, p.194), fall into the same trap:

The statement that Jesus "won over" many Jews *and Gentiles* seems inconsistent with a Christian interpolator. For the Christian tradition, as contained in the Gospels, gives no indication that Jesus ever evangelized the Gentiles....As Meier notes, it seems much less likely that a Christian interpolator would have contradicted the Gospels' own picture of Jesus's ministry than that Josephus himself simply "retrojected the situation of his own day," wherein many among Jesus's followers were Gentiles. In fact, "naive retrojection is a common trait of Greco-Roman historians."

That even evangelical scholars could make such a statement is remarkable, given the stark propensity of Christian scribes throughout the early centuries to amend their own documents to reflect new developments—even at the cost of creating contradictions—and retroject such evolving outlooks into those past writers. As Bart Ehrman says (*The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, p. xii): "scribes sometimes changed their scriptural texts to make them *say* what they were already known to *mean*." To that we need to add that they were also concerned to give previous writers things to say which it was thought they *ought* to have said, and that included non-Christian authors as well.

213

[page 557] Translation by Richard Carrier, "Formation of the New Testament Canon": http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/richard_carrier/NTcanon.html

214

[Page 558] At: http://www.tertillian.org/rpearse/eusebius/eusebius_the_liar.htm

215

[page 555] Alvar Ellegard (*Jesus—One Hundred Years Before Christ*, p.38) has this to say on the matter:

[W]e should keep in mind that Eusebius writes his history with a definite purpose in mind: to show the unity and continuity of the Church from the earliest apostles, the disciples of Christ, onwards and, in particular, that the bishops of the Church succeeded each other in a straight line from the first

apostles. Thus Eusebius gives us bishop lists for the great sees of Rome, Corinth, Jerusalem, Antioch and Alexandria. But, as he provides no contemporary evidence, the lists are suspect, and it may well be that they are purposely arranged (not to say invented) in order to support his own preconceived ideas. The general reliability of Eusebius concerning the early history of the church must be characterized as low: he is far too prone to resort to hearsay and downright fabrications, if it suits his purpose. [Robert M.] Grant (*Eusebius as Church Historian*, p.66) illustrates Eusebius' way of subordinating his narrative to his theological concerns. Speaking about Eusebius' treatment of Tertullian he writes: "Where the evidence did not go far enough, Eusebius amplified it. Where it went too far, he suppressed it." Grant finds that Eusebius does not refer to any sources (outside the NT) older than the middle of the second century A.D. I would add that Eusebius' assertion that Mark was the first bishop of Alexandria lacks all probability.

It has been suggested that Eusebius derived his bishop lists from Hegesippus, but usually Eusebius identifies an earlier Christian source for information, often Hegesippus himself, and in this case he does not.

²¹⁶ [Page 562] On such accounts does Zindler justify (p.33) his

working hypothesis when examining the work of Eusebius and many other Church Fathers: Whenever one encounters material that is suspect on historical, philological, scientific, or other grounds, the default interpretation should be that fraud is involved. As in the *Code Napoleon*, the author is to be considered guilty until proven innocent. This rather un-American rule of thumb is necessitated by the pandemic of priestly pettifoggery which has infected the Christian churches since earliest times and has been transmitted in one mutant form or another right up to the present. (The argumentational techniques and 'evidences' created by so-called scientific creationists and Intelligent Design theorists leap easily to mind as modern examples of this thimblereg tradition.)

To this one might add the censorings which ecclesiastical authorities in the 19th century inflicted on reports sent back to Britain from the eastern colonies about local religious similarities to the myth of Jesus.

²¹⁷ [page 564] According to later Jewish tradition, after the Jewish War with temple and city destroyed, a group of Pharisaic scholars under Johanan ben Zakkai met at Jamnia (Jabneh), a city near the coast of the Mediterranean south of Joppa. There they reconstituted a "Council" to direct Jewish culture and religious observance in the absence of a Temple cult and without a focus on Jerusalem. It was a turning point in the history of Judaism, in that it marked the emergence of rabbinic Judaism as the normative form. The Jamnia council is dated around 90 CE, but there are some who question whether such a meeting really took place. A. J. Saldarini ("Johanan ben Zakkai's Escape from Jerusalem: Origin and Development of a Rabbinic Story," JSJ 6 [1975] p.189-204) regards it as a legend. See J. A. Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism*, p.38-39.

¹⁴⁷ [page 565] Shlomo Pines, *An Arabic Version of the Testimonium Flavianum and its Implications*, see p.8-11.

219 [page 567] "Flavius Josephus and His Testimony Concerning the Historical Jesus" at: <http://www.socinian.org/files/TestimoniumFlavianum.pdf> (Center for Philosophy and Socinian Studies).

220 [page 570] Strictly speaking, in **"the brother of Jesus, the one called Christ,"** the words "the one" are not necessary in English. The "tou" in "*ton adelphon Iesou tou legomenou Christou*" represents a common grammatical practice of repeating or inserting the article before an attributive adjective when it follows the noun it modifies. For example, "the good work" is rendered "to *ergon to agathon* (lit., the work the good)." In our case, "*legomenou*" is a participle, but used as an adjective modifying "*Iesou*," and thus the article "tow" is inserted. This rule may not always be followed, but when it is, the Greek is not necessarily making a point of saying "the one," as the English suggests. Translations of the passage usually include "the one" but sometimes it is merely "called Christ." (Compare Matthew 4:18, where Jesus saw "Simon called Peter": "*Simona ton legomenon Petron*.")) The latter is the form I will use, without "the one."

221 [page 571] At: <http://www.bowness.demon.co.uk/marston2.html>.

222 [page 572] Shaye Cohen (*Josephus in Galilee and Rome*) states:

The uneven method of introducing and re-introducing characters and places is particularly conspicuous in *Vita* ("Life"). Cestius Gallus, the governor of Syria, is mentioned first in *Vita* 23 but his title does not appear until *Vita* 30....Jesus ben Sapphia is introduced in *Vita* 134 as if he were a new character although he appeared at least once before....We meet Ananias, a member of the delegation, in *Vita* 197, but Josephus describes him in *Vita* 290 as if for the first time....Any deductions about Josephus' sources based on these inconsistencies are unreliable.

—quoted on an IIDB forum by D. C. Hindley, who comments:

Josephus, for the most part, does identify new characters (either by naming family relationships and/or significance for a particular location) at first introduction (at least those named Jesus), but also can be inconsistent in introducing and re-introducing characters. I can only propose that AJ 20.200 might represent such a case.

Steve Mason also had this to say in an email posted on the IIDB:

The *Iesous* in Tiberias (*Life*, 271) is the archon, or council-president ([not stated until] 278-79)—a case of mentioning the name shortly before giving the identification. That also happens occasionally in [*Jewish*] *War*. I have wondered whether it is not a deliberate narrative technique: provoking the reader to wonder who this guy is, and then supplying the identification after a few sentences...

223 [page 573] Price (not to be confused with Robert M. Price), "The Case Against Historical Jesus": http://rationalrevolution.net/articles/jesus_myth_history.htm.

224 [page 578] It is worth noting that Origen, in referring to this unknown passage, consistently presents the elements of the phrase referring to James and Jesus in reverse order to that of *Antiquities* 20. The same is true of Eusebius' supposed quote from Josephus (though possibly taken from Origen). For example:

...on account, as Josephus says, of James the Just, the brother of Jesus, called Christ... [Origen, *Contra Celsum*, II, 13]

Such a word order is the natural and sensible one, with James—the actual object of the "on account of"—being the first to be named, and the reference to Jesus being a tacked-on identification for James. Putting it in the reverse,

...on account, as Josephus says, of the brother of Jesus, called Christ, James the Just,

the unnatural and awkward character of such a progression is evident. And yet this is the order we find in the *Antiquities* 20 passage:

...and brought before (the Sanhedrin) the brother of Jesus, called Christ, James by name...

Even though it works grammatically, this word order is completely unnatural. Josephus would be presenting the idea of bringing someone before the Sanhedrin and then making that someone "the brother of Jesus, called Christ," with "James" added on as a descriptive of who that brother was. What bizarre turn of thought would have led him to present things this way? It would imply that Jesus was so important and so well-known to both him and his readers that Josephus himself was giving Jesus a 'pride of place' position in their thoughts—along with, moreover, his favorite title of "Messiah."

This observation alone ought to discredit the claimed authenticity of the passage and render it a Christian interpolation. Looking at various possibilities, if Josephus himself wrote "brother of Jesus" and put it before "James," this could be understandable because that "Jesus" was an essential element of the story, being the "son of Damneus" who inherited the high priesthood. Or, he in fact may have written "brought before them James the brother of Jesus" and the word order was reversed by the interpolator in order to give *his* Jesus pride of place. If the whole phrase "brother of Jesus, called Christ" began only as a marginal gloss, the scribe later inserting it chose to place it before James rather than after, again likely due to a pride of place motive.

As for the lost reference itself, Eusebius may be quoting from Origen, with Origen relying on his memory. Thus their 'quotes' may reflect not the actual wording of that phrase in the lost reference, but a natural tendency on Origen's part to present the ideas according to a more reasonable order of thought. The interpolator of the lost reference could have been the one who first gave Jesus pride of place, with the interpolator of the *Antiquities* 20 passage following suit.

225 **[page 581]** Josephus provides ample evidence of his own view of the causes of the calamity. In the *Antiquities* he condemns the entire revolutionary movement beginning with Judas the Galilean (in 6 CE) for laying "the foundations of our future miseries" (XVIII, 1, 1 / 18.1). In *Jewish War* (IV, 5, 2/4.314f) he focuses on the murder of Ananus the High Priest by the Zealots as the "beginning of the capture of the city," linking this with the idea that God was now cooperating in the destruction of the city and Temple as a means of purifying them from the defilement caused by actions such as this. Steve Mason (*op.cit.*, p. 186) stresses Josephus' "thesis that violation of the Jewish laws leads to disaster," and that "lawlessness among the aristocracy...brought destruction on Jerusalem." One

can perceive a balancing act on Josephus' part, between acknowledging Roman military might and its inevitable victory, and God's determination to see the crimes and blasphemies of the Zealot rabble punished. In the face of those two forces, Jerusalem was bound to fall. Such a view of the matter is one of far greater scope and complexity than the thought of one man's execution being divinely avenged, a man Josephus has failed to address beyond a few words, a man who played no part in the lead-up to the War—and a Christian besides.

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[page 555] This is not to suggest that "brother of the Lord" is what Josephus could have originally written. Quite apart from arguments that he is not speaking of James the Just, it is unlikely that he would have been familiar with such a title for the Christian James and even less likely that he would have chosen to use it, since it would be meaningless and misleading to any reader. What Photius' copy indicates is that this is certain to be a Christian insertion, another doctoring of the *Antiquities* 20 text to make its James the Christian one. The phrase may have begun as a marginal gloss by one scribe to voice that assumption using the familiar phrase "brother of the Lord" in its sibling understanding (any time after the mid 2nd century), and later it was inserted into the text by another scribe. All this would have happened within a manuscript line that was independent of the one which now contains the extant version of the passage. It was a line which, as Photius indicates by his silence, contained no *Testimonium* or any other direct reference to Jesus, and it subsequently died out, never to reach us. (Or it was converted by amendment and the insertion of the *Testimonium*.)

Chapter 34: Tacitus, Suetonius, Pliny (pages 587 to 642)

227

[page 559] *Geschichte des Römischen Kaiserreichs unter der Regierung des Nero* (1872), p.7. Evaluating such comments together with the difference in outlook between the two modern periods is beyond the scope of this chapter, but we might remark on a similar comparison between earlier and more recent modern scholarship regarding Josephus, in that, as noted in the previous chapter, scholars of the early 20th century tended to reject any authenticity in Josephus in regard to Jesus, whereas the more recent trend is to claim residual authenticity.

228

[page 595] My thanks to Richard Carrier for his clarification of these titles and their application to Pilate, and for his permission to make use of his unpublished study of the issue.

229

[page 596] "The Popes and their Church" at: http://www.infidels.org/library/historical/joseph_mccabe/popes_and_church/PandC-1.html.

230

[page 599] An attempt has been made to derive a specific sequence out of the first part of this passage: "At Rome Nero was the first who stained with blood the rising faith. Then [tunc] is Peter girt by another, when he is made fast to the cross. Then [tunc] does Paul obtain a birth suited to Roman citizenship, when in Rome he springs to life again ennobled by martyrdom." The "stained with blood the rising faith" is alleged to refer to the Neronian persecution as described by Tacitus, to be followed by ("then") the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul. But the Latin "tunc" (then), while it can mean "afterward" as in English, it can also mean, as in English, "at that time." In fact, the sequence of thought reads more naturally with the latter sense, especially in conjunction with the use of the

present tense to describe the experiences of Peter and Paul. That tense implies a simultaneity with the action first stated, that of Nero staining with blood the rising faith; in other words, the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul are what *constitute* the staining with blood, or at least its primary component—perhaps the only one Tertullian is familiar with. We must also question whether it is feasible to think that Tertullian would pass over so cursorily such a dramatic event as the Christian slaughter we find in Tacitus, giving us not even the hint of a detail.

We may also note that there would be problems with the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul if they took place within a few years on either side of the fire. Legends about those martyrdoms, allegedly taking place in Rome, did not develop until some time in the 2nd century, and while no specific dates were pinpointed, both were regarded as occurring in the mid-60s. But from that distance, it would have been virtually inevitable that their martyrdom legends would have taken shape in the context of the general persecution of Christians by Nero as a result of the fire—had such a memorable persecution taken place. Yet no such linkage can be found within those ancient martyrdom legends. This strongly suggests that 2nd century Christians had no knowledge of this dramatic event of persecution. Such an ignorance is corroborated in many documents we will be looking at.

231 **[page 606]** For both of these texts, see E. Hennecke *New Testament Apocrypha*,
 232 vol. 2, p.259-390.

[page 608] Sweet, however, still regards 7:14's 'great tribulation' as a reference to "Nero's notorious persecution of Christians" (p.21), and 17:6 as the same (p.26). He also remarks (p.23): "According to later tradition Peter and Paul were among those put to death [as part of the Neronian persecution in Tacitus, which Sweet has just quoted, though we have seen that Christian tradition itself makes no such identifiable link]. This was the first official move against Christians as such, and left an indelible scar on the Christian imagination." So far, however, in the record of that "Christian imagination," we have uncovered, rather than an
 233 "indelible scar," nothing more than a slight scratch.

[page 609] Translation and commentary by John J. Collins, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol.1, p.396.

[page 611] While modern translations of key phrases in Suetonius and Tacitus usually render both as "a mischievous superstition," the Latin is in fact different: "*exitiabilis superstitio*" in Tacitus, and "*superstitionis novae ac maleficae*" in Suetonius. Prominent translations of both also have the phrase "a class of men,"
 235 but a Latin equivalent appears only in Suetonius.

[page 611] It has been suggested that Suetonius included the persecution of the Christians where he has because the context is one concerning Nero's positive accomplishments; whereas the fire is part of a context which describes Nero's cruelties and murders of various people around him, as well as the fire itself which he was alleged to have engineered. These latter were 'negative' actions; thus to include the 'positive' persecution among the negative items would have been "inconsistent."

This is surely an example of the over-subtle and sophistic reasoning too often indulged in by some modern commentators (many of them on the Internet) to try to explain why a text does not say the things we would normally expect it to say.

No better example of Nero's cruelty would have presented itself to Suetonius than his slaughter of the Christians, and to think that he preferred to leave it out here and instead chose to regard it as something positive and so include it with Nero's legal refinements borders on the absurd. Any 'inconsistency' in his alleged rigid categorization if he had included the persecution with the fire would have been trumped by the far more blatant inconsistency of not mentioning it when he was describing the event it was closely associated with, indeed the event whose very cause was allegedly those Christians.

In any case, there was nothing to prevent Suetonius from mentioning it in both places, and certainly nothing to prevent him, no matter how 'positive' he might have regarded the matter, from mentioning in chapter 16 the very dramatic reason for this "punishment inflicted on the Christians." It is ironic that here, in its vague and unspecific character, we now have a remark on the part of a pagan which is every bit as opaque and frustrating as the cursory and unspecific remarks we have collected in the early Christian writers. Could it be that both were equally unsure of what they were referring to? In fact, are we justified in taking the passage in *Life of Nero* 38, in which he directly says that "(Nero) set fire to the city" in order to clear out "the ugliness of old buildings and the narrow crooked streets," as ruling out any knowledge by Suetonius' of an accusation and persecution against Christians for being the ones who set the fire. This would all but guarantee the conclusion that such ignorance on the part of a major historian so soon after the alleged event is sufficient proof that it never happened, that the account in Tacitus about the Christian slaughter is not authentic, and that even the line in Suetonius' chapter 16 may be an interpolation as well.

236

[page 615] Here we can note that curious passage quoted in Tacitus' description of the onset of the fire:

And no one dared to stop the mischief, because of incessant menaces from a number of persons who forbade the extinguishing of the flames, because again others openly hurled brands, and kept shouting that there was one who gave them authority, either seeking to plunder more freely, or obeying orders.

Tacitus gives no hint of what or who he has in mind here. He could be repeating apocryphal reports arising out of later rumors that Nero had had the fire set, or these might be considered as rumors related to a belief that either Christians or Jews (the possibility of the latter will be discussed later) had set the fire. But in a later atmosphere of "blaming the Christians," this statement could have given rise to or supported a pagan conviction that Christian responsibility as arsonists of the fire was something which Tacitus had here actually pointed to.

237

[page 618] Meier in *A Marginal Jew* (I, p.89) laments this lacuna and remarks that "we will never know whether Tacitus mentioned Jesus in his treatment of the years 30-31." But if the impression in 15:44 (if authentic) is that this is his first mention of "Christ," we may in fact conclude from this that Tacitus did not mention Jesus when dealing with the earlier period of the lacuna.

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[page 618] Tacitus is not the only notable excision. In Cassius Dio, Carrier (in an e-mail) notes that there is a lacuna covering the years 6 BCE to 2 BCE. Since Dio's surviving material implies he discussed Herod's death in that period, "we can conjecture that a Christian would expect Dio to also discuss the slaughter of

innocents, any magic star or goings on about messiahs and magi at Herod's court, and so on, or even the birth of Jesus, etc., so his silence on these might have been as embarrassing as in the case of Tacitus." All this, too, would have been a challenge to insert.

And while on the subject, and since Seneca has been mentioned, Augustine quotes a text of Seneca called "On Superstition," in which, he notes, no mention was made of Christians. Seneca (writing perhaps in the 50s or early 60s) did, however, attack a range of what he regarded as superstitious sects, both Jewish and pagan. Carrier remarks, "It is curious indeed that it wasn't preserved at all, despite almost everything Seneca wrote having been preserved, and the fact that you would think Christians would love a text that attacked Jews and pagans, especially by such an eminent pagan philosopher as Seneca."

239 [page 619] Translation at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/ecf/211/2110218.htm>

240 [page 620] There has long been a line of thought that the entire *Annals* is a Renaissance forgery, perhaps by the Italian who "discovered" it, a certain Poggio Bracciolini in the 15th century. This is something of an urban legend that has taken on a life of its own, often cropping up in Internet lists of reasons to reject *Annals* 15:44 as being authentic to Tacitus. However, the manuscript history of the two surviving parts of the *Annals* (too detailed to go into here) indicates that both were in existence before the 15th century. (A good work to consult is C. W. Mendell's *Tacitus: The Man and his Work*.) Unfortunately, none of the evidence for use and knowledge of the *Annals* (virtually non-existent in the first few centuries) casts light on when 15:44 itself became known. If Severus is not taken to indicate this (he does not *cite* Tacitus, and his 'quote' is not nearly as "word for word" as is sometimes claimed), we would indeed have no testimony to the Christians/Christ passage before the Renaissance.

As for the claim of forgery of the entire *Annals* during the Renaissance, there seems little reasonable basis for this, quite apart from the manuscript history. It is one matter to interpolate a sentence or paragraph and imitate the style of a previous author to a sufficient extent to achieve some success in deceiving readers; but it is surely another matter to forge an entire work and accomplish the same feat. The works of Tacitus have been studied for centuries now; his unique style has become familiar to generations of scholars. No one, to my knowledge, has perceived any anomalies in the *Annals* in regard to style, structure or characterization. We have no reason to regard Poggio Bracciolini, or any other Renaissance writer, as a master forger capable of such an astonishing degree of imitation and deception. Moreover, Renaissance historiography was hardly advanced and sophisticated enough to discover or produce all the details found in the *Annals*. Furthermore, are we to consider that Poggio ran out of inspiration for the periods covered in the lost portions? Would any forgery be likely to have been presented as incomplete? If it be maintained that this could have been a deliberate ploy to convey authenticity, would a Christian choose as one of those hiatuses to leave out all mention of Jesus in the hiatus of *Annals* 5?

Arthur Drews (*op.cit.*, p.47), who wagers on forgery and Poggian authorship, is forced to reveal a hand which contains one very low card. In a footnote he slips in an observation which shows how problematic the forgery position can be. If the *Annals* did not exist until the Renaissance, then the passage in Severus

is original to him; but then it would have to have served as an essential source of certain 15:44 details, due to some close literary commonalities. As quoted by Drews, P. Hochart pointed out that, while certain other works of Severus were found in many medieval libraries, "there was only one manuscript of his *Chronicle*, probably of the eleventh century....Hence the work was almost unknown throughout the Middle Ages, and no one was aware of the reference in it to a Roman persecution of the Christians." But then comes Drews' attempt to explain a consequent sticky problem: "It is noteworthy that Poggio Bracciolini seems by some lucky chance to have discovered and read this manuscript." Of course, there is no actual record that Poggio did have such a fortunate encounter with Severus, to use him in constructing the 15:44 passage in his forgery.

²⁴¹ [page 623] From about the end of the 1st century, popular and official views of Christians started to become more negative and grotesque, until they envisioned ritual murder of children, cannibalism and assorted abominations committed during their clandestine rites (as witnessed in *Minucius Felix*). Ideas like these are a common form of excess which the prejudiced and uninformed often visit upon groups they are mistrustful of. Christians themselves have held a carbon copy of such views toward the Jews, in the Middle Ages and not-so-middle ages.

The official basis of such prejudice was the Christian refusal to sacrifice to the state gods and acknowledge the divinity of the current emperor. Such worship was looked upon as one of the ordinary and essential duties of life, necessary for a safe and spiritually healthy society. Disavowal of them was a crime, requiring severe punishment. The charge of "atheism" and disloyalty to Rome was natural; Christians were seen as undermining society and corrupting ancient wisdom. (Jews were traditionally granted an exemption in being allowed to modify their obeisance to the emperor so as not to contravene their religious principles, but no such loophole was extended to the Christians.)

However, in the time of Nero such prejudice and persecution (outside of the 'record' in Tacitus) is barely perceivable—mainly because Christians themselves were barely perceivable. The letters of Paul talk of animosity toward apostles like himself, but little is said about Christian converts suffering persecution by the Roman authorities (as opposed to Jewish ones). The Epistle to the Hebrews alludes to a persecution which is discouraging the members of the community, but its nature and source is unclear. The portrayal of Christians as loathed and despised by the people, ripe for suspicion and slaughter as arsonists seems unrealistic this early. Nor can we say that Tacitus is reading the stronger animosity of his own time back into that of Nero, since if his account of the savagery against Christians as a result of the fire has any basis, this would become its own witness to an existing enmity at that earlier time. If anything is being read back into the time of Nero it is from the time of the interpolator if this passage has been inserted by a later Christian or pagan.

²⁴² [Page 624] For a compact study of this question, together with a reproduction of an ultraviolet photograph of the manuscript page, see "The Chrestianos Issue in Tacitus Reinvestigated, 2009" by Erik Zara, at: <http://www.textexcavation.com/zaratacituschrestianos.pdf>. On an early (?) "Chrestiani" inscription, see the same author's "Chrestians Before Christians? An Old Inscription Revisited, 2009" at: <http://www.textexcavation.com/documents/zarachrestianinscription.pdf>.

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[page 626] Josephus, it is true, does not mention a persecution of Jews in Rome after the fire. But neither does he mention the Suetonius expulsion of Jews from Rome in the time of Claudius, even though he gave us an expulsion by Tiberius in 19 CE (two paragraphs after the placement of the *Testimonium*). Generally speaking, Josephus is not so concerned with Jewish history outside Palestine. Moreover, he could have passed up mentioning a punishment of Jews for the fire (it was irrelevant to his purposes) because it would have required including a discussion of Jewish messianism, a topic he studiously avoided.

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[page 631] It has been noted that the two forms for "Christians" may have been virtually interchangeable, as though one was as acceptable in popular circles as the other. But was this equally true in regard to "*Christus*" vs. "*Chrestus*" for Christ—and when? Justin and Tertullian charge that the pagan's tendency to say "Chrestians" is a mistake, though it is a felicitous mistake, since the erroneous term means "good" and "excellent," which they maintain would be a proper description for Christians. But neither says anything about a practice of changing "*Christus*" to "*Chrestus*." Nor can we assume that one should automatically involve the other. If Justin and Tertullian could draw on the pun to declare ironically that "Chrestians" was fitting since it implied that believers were "the good ones," they would have been very likely to make ironic use of a similar pun in regard to Christ as well, to declare that he, too, was a "good one," contrary to the pagan tendency to malign him.

The earliest witness we have to an interchangeability between "*Christus*" and "*Chrestus*" (this among Christians themselves) comes with Lactantius (c300)—who like Tertullian and Justin criticizes the practice, indicating that it was not an accepted phenomenon—and some church inscriptions and gravestones around the same time. But we cannot assume the same situation obtained in the earlier centuries. This further argues against the possible understanding of "*Chresto*" in Suetonius to be a mistaken reference to Christ.

Van Voorst appeals to the fact (p.34) that "none of the surviving manuscripts of *Lives*, which date from the ninth to the fifteenth centuries, ventured to change [Suetonius'] *Chresto* to *Christo*. [But Paulus Orosius did so in commenting on Suetonius' line in his own work.] This indicates that *Chresto* made some sense as it stands." It may be that medieval Christian scribes would assume that Suetonius had meant "Christ" and that a longstanding practice (by their time) of using both forms to refer to Jesus made it unnecessary to alter his text. But again, we cannot make the same assumption about the late 1st and early 2nd centuries. And it does not change the host of problems involved in understanding the passage that way.

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[page 634] Cassius Dio does not report Claudius' expulsion of Jews from Rome, although he records (57, 18.5) the earlier expulsion by Tiberius in 19 CE, also reported by Josephus (*Antiquities* 18.3.5). However, Dio gives as the reason for the latter the fact that they were coming in great numbers to the city and were "converting many of the natives to their ways." Whereas, Josephus presents the matter as the consequence of a scandal in which four Jewish men swindled the matron Fulvia, a convert to Judaism, out of a donation to the Jerusalem Temple.

It can sometimes be risky to base arguments on the specific accounts of historians, because they so often differ from one another; and it is not uncommon

to find one historian silent on a matter or event which is spotlighted, sometimes in considerable detail, by another—although, being silent on the Christians as arsonists of the fire and their garish punishment would be notably egregious. Dio's silence on the expulsion of the Jews by Claudius together with Suetonius' silence on the Jewish meeting ban reported by Dio (usually dated several years apart), has led some scholars to try to amalgamate the two. They propose that Claudius did not make a general expulsion of the Jews (or the Christians), or else changed his mind before it was carried out. But this creates its own problems, and the lack of corroboration for each historian's event is probably an example of the 'pot luck' situation in regard to what we might find in any given writer.

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[page 635] In the original *The Jesus Puzzle* I suggested that one interpretation of the passage could be that "Even if *Chrestus* refers to Christ, the original situation may have related to Roman Christians who followed a mythic Christ. Though we cannot tell from the passage itself, by the time Suetonius came to write he too may have been influenced by Christian hearsay in Rome about the reputed founder of the movement." In other words, an original situation involving a spiritual Christ such as that of Paul could have evolved into a Christ who, in Suetonius' mind, was misunderstood as a human man present on the scene. While that might be a viable rejoinder to the position that "*Chrestus*" meant "*Christus*" (a human founder of that name), it would require us to accept the accompanying theory that "the Jews" referred to Christians, and to overlook the problems surrounding such an interpretation.

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[page 655] Translations (the translator is not identified) are taken from "Letters of Pliny the Younger" published online by the Walter Scott Publishing Co., at: http://ancienthistory.about.com/library/bl/bljextjplinyltrsl_intro.htm.

248

[Page 642] This is reluctantly admitted by Eddy and Boyd (*The Jesus Legend*, p. 175-6), Van Voorst (*Jesus Outside the New Testament*, p.29), Meier (*A Marginal Jew*, v.1, p.92), France (*The Evidence for Jesus*, p.43), Evans ("Jesus in Non-Christians Sources," p.459). Yet true to form, Eddy and Boyd go on to maintain that Pliny is "nevertheless valuable...because it likely indicates that both Christians and non-Christians assumed Jesus was a historical person at the beginning of the second century," and that "Pliny's testimony tells us that the Christians of this time worshipped Jesus as God." Considering that the text of Pliny's letter is far from telling us any of this, the 'assuming' lies entirely with the modern wish to have it so.

Chapter 35: *Thallus, Phlegon, Mara* (pages 643 to 656)

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[page 644] It is sometimes claimed that Josephus indicated that Thallus preceded him. This is derived from Tertullian's remark (Apology 19.5-6) that a number of historians, including Thallus, have been either proven or refuted by Josephus. But Josephus nowhere mentions Thallus, and a past conjecture which amended a word in Josephus to turn it into "Thallos" is no longer considered justified, a conjecture which in any case would not necessarily identify such a person with the historian. Tertullian may have meant that Josephus' own comments on the subject in question refuted the opinions of those historians, without implying that Thallus had to have written before Josephus. For a discussion of matters relating

to the dating of Thallus, see Richard Carrier's article "Thallus: An Analysis" at: http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/richard_carrier/thallus.html.

250 **[page 645]** The translation of this passage on Roger Pearse's www.tertullian.org reads: "Thallus dismisses this darkness as a solar eclipse." But this is a Gospel-based orientation. The Greek word is "*apokalei*" which means simply "call" or
 251 "name." There need be no 'dismissing' of some other idea implied.

[page 648] In this connection we should note that Phlegon identifies the year of his eclipse as equivalent to 32 CE. It is quite possible that Thallus did as well—at least no one suggests that he differed from Phlegon; and Eusebius' unnamed chronicle(s), which may well refer to or include Thallus, also date the eclipse to the same year. And yet modern astronomers have calculated that the only major eclipse in that area around this time took place in November of 29. If Thallus wrote less than thirty years later, it is not likely he would have been off by as much as three years. But historians writing over a century later could more likely
 252 have been capable of such a mistake.

[page 649] Another alternative is noted by Carrier in his article on Thallus (see note 249). He points out that the sentence about Phlegon in Africanus, as quoted by Syncellus, has possibly been interpolated. It interrupts the flow of the text and would thus be an insertion *after* Africanus, either before or after Syncellus.
 253

[page 653] Translation taken from *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. VIII, p.737. This letter was included in the ANF because at that time (late 19th century) the strong possibility of Mara having been a Christian was a widely held opinion, and thus the "Wise King" was presumed to be Jesus. To be on the safe side, one supposes, the editors of the ANF bestowed capitalization on the phrase.
 254

[page 653] Van Voorst calls attention (p.54) to the fact that the term "'king' is prominently connected to Jesus at his trial, and especially at his death in the *titulus* on his cross," but it is highly unlikely that Mara would give him such a designation on the basis of this, or that he would be familiar with such esoteric Gospel details. Not even Christians called Jesus a "king" on this basis. Indeed, Van Voorst has already acknowledged that the term "king" is "not at all a common Christological title," and later he will note that "wise king" is not attested at all in Christian literature.
 255

[Page 654] Earlier in the letter, Mara invites certain famous men to "rejoice in" whatever it is they are remembered for, Darius for his empire, Achilles for his bravery, and so on. The final two are Socrates (for his wisdom) and Pythagoras (for his learning). Jesus is not mentioned here, probably because Mara does not have a name, and because he is not a 'household name' like the others or of equal ranking, suggesting again that whatever he had in mind about the "wise king," mention of him served only to provide a third example. Thus, Eddy and Boyd's claim (*op.cit.*, p.174) that Mara "clearly assumed his son would know who he was referring to, otherwise his reference to this 'wise king' has no point," is unnecessary. Besides, to judge by references in the letter, Mara's son was "young in years" and a "little boy," not, as Eddy and Boyd have it, "apparently a governing official." And a young boy would not be expected to be familiar with something as vague as an undated and unnamed "wise king" of the Jews.

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[Bibliographies rarely include works of fiction, but here I want to recommend a unique project in historical fiction by the late American writer Vardis Fisher, known as the Testament of Man. This series of eleven novels, published from 1943 to 1958, spans two million years, from the dawn of human intelligence to the Christian Middle Ages. It follows the development of humanity's religious ideas, with particular focus in the later novels on the Judaeo-Christian evolution. No. 8, *Jesus Came Again: A Parable*, and No. 9, *A Goat For Azazel*, address the questions of Jesus and Christian origins. Fisher based his work on the best and most progressive scholarship of his day, meeting condemnation by critics and Church for his uncompromising portrayal of Jewish and Christian ideas.]

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JESUS: NEITHER GOD NOR MAN

The Case for a Mythical Jesus

Mainstream biblical scholarship is far from achieving consensus in its ongoing attempt to separate the glorified Jesus of faith from the ever elusive Jesus of history. It remains to be seen how soon traditional academia will overcome its reluctance to take the plunge into the New Testament's final, uncharted territory: the theory that Christianity began with belief in a spiritual heavenly Son of God, that the Gospels are essentially allegory and fiction, and that no "historical Jesus" worthy of the name existed...

The Gospels and Acts of the Apostles form one small portion of the early Christian documentary record. They reflect but one category of thought and witness to what that broad movement came to believe in. Modern scholars and believers alike view the world of early Christianity through the prism of this narrow handful of inbred writings, a chain of literary dependency and enlargement on the first one written, and it has distorted all that they see. The Gospels and Acts need to be put in their proper perspective, so that they no longer obscure a more clear-eyed view of what early Christianity constituted. That view can be found in everything from the New Testament epistles to the non-canonical documents, to the writings of the Gnostics and second century apologists. Until we allow ourselves to recognize what broader factors of the era brought the idea of a Jesus into being, and how he evolved over the first 150 years, the Western world will continue to live and perpetuate a fantasy...

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